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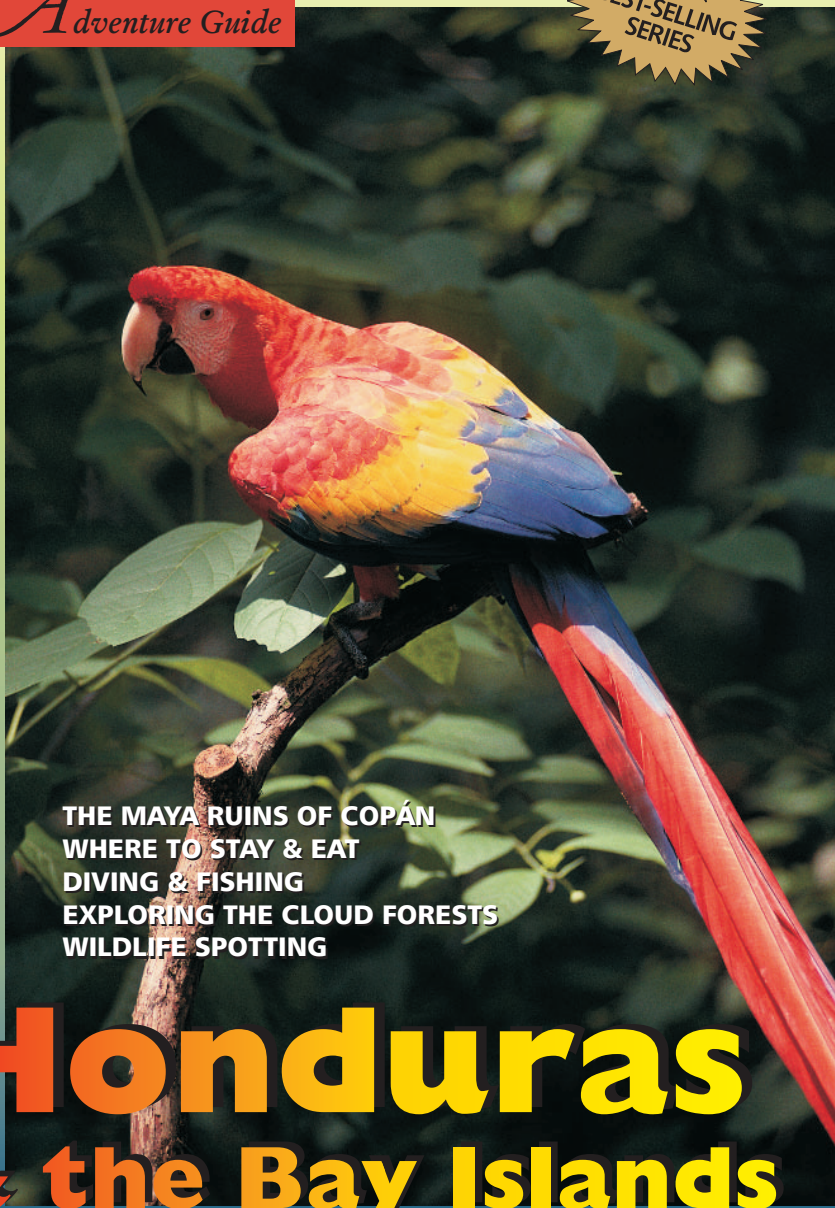

THE MAYA RUINS OF COPÁN
WHERE TO STAY & EAT
DIVING & FISHING
EXPLORING THE CLOUD FORESTS
WILDLIFE SPOTTING

Honduras & the Bay Islands

Maria Fiallos

VISIT…

Adventure Guide

Honduras
& the Bay Islands

Maria Fiallos

"This comprehensive, easy-to-use adventure guide opens the doors to our unique country for the independent traveler. Welcome to Honduras." – *Honduran Institute of Tourism*

HUNTER

HUNTER PUBLISHING, INC,
130 Campus Drive, Edison, NJ 08818
☎ 732-225-1900; 800-255-0343; fax 732-417-1744
www.hunterpublishing.com

Ulysses Travel Publications
4176 Saint-Denis, Montréal, Québec
Canada H2W 2M5
☎ 514-843-9882, ext. 2232; fax 514-843-9448

Windsor Books
The Boundary, Wheatley Road, Garsington
Oxford, OX44 9EJ England
☎ 01865-361122; fax 01865-361133

ISBN 1-58843-575-X
© 2006 Hunter Publishing, Inc.
Manufactured in the United States of America

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my children, Antonio Carlos and Maya Camila.

Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude to the following people for helping me get this book off the ground: Karla Moncada, Hattie Connor, Ana Lucia Funez, Alfredo Zuniga from the Honduran Institute of Tourism, and Rowina Barahona from Multiviajes Travel Agency, for patiently providing me with updated information whenever I requested it; Fred Elmendorf for carefully reading the entire draft; Dean Milverton from www.roatanet.com for his assistance with the Bay Islands chapter; John Binns for his contribution about the Utila Swamper Iguana; Omega Tours and Moskitia Ecoaventuras for information and photographs; Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle for his invaluable input concerning the Maya, and Juan Bendeck for photographs; and my friend Melanie Wetzel, for helping me keep it all together. To you all and to the numerous others not mentioned herein, thank you for your support, knowledge, and the use of your facilities during my travels.

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Introduction

Once a Banana Republic, now a natural wonder… Honduras.

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The Republic of Honduras in Central America remains largely undiscovered by the mainstream tourist. Pristine coral reefs, warm tropical waters, rainforests, and rivers meandering through remote jungle areas wait to be explored. Accommodations ranging from budget hostels to luxury resorts and nature lodges are available; and, while the service is not always the best and the roads can be long, Honduran people will invariably greet you with a smile and lend a helpful hand when needed. A diamond in the rough, this small country offers a variety of travel experiences and plenty of adventure.

The north or Caribbean coast, boasting mile upon mile of white sand beaches, lush tropical vegetation and cultural diversity, is a favorite with travelers. Just 30 miles off the north coast are the Bay Islands, famous for first-class diving off the second-largest barrier reef in the world that starts in the waters off the Yucatán Peninsula in Mexico and extends southward. The Bay Islands are known as one of the world's favorite "diver's certification" destinations because of the numerous courses offered in several different languages by native speakers including English, Italian, German, and

French, among others. Just 45 minutes by boat from the port city of La Ceiba are the scarcely populated Cayos Cochinos or Hog Islands – a national marine park – providing unparallel diving opportunities close to the mainland.

For the traveler seeking a nature experience, an extensive park system – covering nearly 24% of the country's total area – provide the opportunity to trek cloud- and rainforests for the day. Or you can take a prolonged canoe journey within dense rainforest areas into which no roads lead, and where such elusive wildlife as jaguars and giant anteaters reside. The United Nations declared one such area, the Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve, a World Heritage Site in 1982. Coastal wetlands are home to monkeys, manatees, alligators, and dozens of species of waterfowl, and offer the opportunity to kayak or embark on a boat voyage through mysterious mangroves. For the more adventurous, the Río Cangrejal near La Ceiba offers world-class white-water rafting.

A veritable bird-watcher's paradise, both the inland Lake Yojoa region as well as the area surrounding the coastal city of Tela have registered nearly 400 of the 700 species of birds, both native and migratory, that can be observed in Honduras.

The ancient Maya ruins of Copán, a famed archaeological World Heritage Site, guard the secrets of the ancestors of the modern Mesoamerican men whose faces closely resemble those carved in stelae. Scientific enigmas to be explored include the shining skulls of the over 2,500-year-old Talgua Caves. The pre-Columbian city found in Los Naranjos Archaeological Park was just recently opened to the public. It is estimated that in its heyday, the city had 20,000 residents.

Throughout the country, the Spanish Colonial heritage can be noted in local architecture, as well as in preserved monuments such as government buildings, churches, and forts. Weekly open-air markets are usually held on or near church or municipal plazas. The ripe mangos, oranges, bananas, avocados and tomatoes add charm and color to the country villages where most people reside in whitewashed adobe houses with red tile roofs.

The descent to the Pacific South coast offers a breathtaking view of the Golf of Fonseca bordered by three countries – Nic-

aragua, El Salvador and Honduras. The Southern coastal wetlands were included on the RAMSAR Convention's List of Wetlands of International Importance in 1999.

A DOZEN REASONS TO VISIT HONDURAS

- Great diving on the second largest barrier reef in the world.
- The Maya ruins of Copán, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The hieroglyphic stairway in Copán is the longest in the Mayan world.
- 112 protected areas.
- Diving, river rafting, kayaking, hiking, biking, horseback riding in the midst of exuberant tropical nature.
- The most protected cloud forests in the world. There are 35 reserves representing 10% of the world's protected cloud forests.
- The Río Plátano Reserve of Man Biosphere, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- La Moskitia, encompasses the largest rainforest region in Central America.
- The shining skulls of Talgua.
- More than 700 species of birds.
- The best year-round whale shark sighting.
- The least expensive place in the hemisphere to obtain basic open-water dive certification.
- 7,500 plant species.

■ Using This Guide

This book is organized based on major geographical regions. For every region there is detailed information on getting there, accommodations, Internet access, and unique adventures, with emphasis on park areas.

- The north or Caribbean coast, possessing a burgeoning nature travel industry;
- Bay Islands, a diver's paradise
- Copán and the Western Highlands
- Central Honduras
- Tegucigalpa and Eastern Honduras
- La Moskitia and Olancho, a remote region for the ultimate rainforest adventure
- Southern Honduras

Travel information concerning car rentals and bus routes is listed on pages 58-62. For tour operators, see the specific locations described in each chapter.

> **Note:** Addresses are listed by Avenue (Ave) and Street or Calle (C) and directions are listed with the acronyms in Spanish (so you can ask someone if you get lost) as follows: northeast (noreste-NE), southeast (sureste-SE), northwest (noroeste-NO) and southwest (suroeste-SO) sections.
>
> Therefore an address as follows, 8-9 Ave NO, 8 C, translates as between 8th and 9th Avenues Northwest, Eighth Street. Another example is 6 Ave SO, 10-11 C, which translates to 6th Avenue Southwest, between 10th and 11th Streets.

■ History

Honduras has a rich history dating back thousands of years when indigenous tribes from both the North and South American continents arrived. You can explore Maya ruins and sail the seas of the Caribbean coast where pirates plied their deadly trade.

Because of its position between the larger American continents and the passage of travelers between the two, Honduras has been home to a variety of cultures over the centuries.

THE BAY ISLANDS
GUATEMALA
Guanaja
Coxen Hole
Utila
Cayos Cochinos
Caribbean Sea
N
Puerto Cortes
Truijillo
Tela
La Ceiba
San Pedro Sula
NORTH COAST
OLANCHO & LA MOSKITIA
Puerto Lempira
Santa Barbara
Yoro
CENTRL HONDURAS
COPAN & WESTERN HONDURAS
Copán Ruinas
Juticalpa
Comayagua
La Paz
La Esperanza
TEGUCIGALPA & SOUTHEAST HONDURAS
TEGUCIGALPA
NICARAGUA
EL SALVADOR
SOUTHERN HONDURAS
Choluteca
Regions
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NOT TO SCALE

There is evidence of human settlements found dating prior to 1600 BC.

Honduras bordered two great cultural areas:

Mesoamerica, the area in which several ancient cultures shared religious beliefs, art, architecture, and technology from about 1500 BC to AD 1519, extended from what is today southern Texas to the Maya ruins of Copán in Honduras;

The **Intermediate Area**, between the areas occupied by pre-European high cultures of Mesoamerica and South America, ran through lower Central America and farther south to include the western coastal parts of Ecuador, Colombia, and Venezuela, where evidence of human activity dates back to 9000 BC.

The pre-Columbian heritage can be observed most notably in the ruins of Copán, El Puente Archaeological Park, Los Naranjos Archaeological Park, the Sula Valley, the Walpa Ulban Sirpe and Walpa Ulban Tara petroglyphs in the Río Plátano Biosphere, and the Talgua Caves in Olancho.

The Maya

The Maya civilization covered the area known today as southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize and Western Honduras. The ruins of large cities can be found throughout the region; Copán, in Honduras, is a prime example of this lost civilization.

Pre-Classic Period (1500 BC to 300 AD)

As the population grew and inhabited larger towns, the Maya language developed. During the previous 6,000 years, the people had gone from nomadic hunter-gatherers to farmers residing in small villages and, around 2000 BC, pottery, looms, and ceramics appeared. Communities were headed by groups of elders, shamans, or chiefs, who developed religious rain and fertility cults.

The Maya civilization had no central government, but was rather organized into city states with a common cultural background, which sometimes cooperated and at other times went to war against each other. Unlike other warrior states that sought to take over, the Maya culture incorporated and further developed elements they acquired from their neighbors.

The **Olmec** civilization of southern Mexico influenced Maya culture greatly. The religion, calendar, and use of glyphs for writing can all be traced back to the Olmec, a culture that disappeared before the Christian era. From 300 BC to 300 AD, the Maya experienced a cultural explosion as the population increased, great advances were made in architecture, writing, and calendrics, and the first great cities were built.

Classic Period (300 to 900 AD)

During this time, a hierarchal system of government emerged, ruled by kings and nobles, which included teachers, scribes, warriors, architects, administrators, craftsmen, merchants, and laborers. The long-count calendar, hieroglyphics, ceramics, and large-scale urban planning were widespread in many areas, where great cities were built with a support network of outlying towns and farmlands.

Around 650 AD, when the Teotihuacán civilization collapsed, the Maya civilization flourished, reaching its zenith as the population grew and cities expanded. They were larger and more populated than any European city. Art, astronomy and religion reached new heights. Ironically, the large cities probably contributed to the demise of the Maya civilization. Over-population in and around the cities, and the consequent depletion of natural resources in surrounding areas, led to their eventual abandonment.

After the collapse of Maya culture, the **Lenca**, who live in the western-central area of the country, became the dominant cultural group in Honduras. When the Spaniards arrived in America, several tribes inhabited the country. The **Pech** and **Sumu tribes**, still present today, lived in the north coast and Olancho regions and are descendants of South American Chibchans. The **Tolupan** lived in the north-central region and the **Pipils** and **Chorotega**, of Mexican ancestry, lived along the south coast and the area of present day Choluteca. These tribes maintained commercial relations with each other and with other indigenous populations from Mexico to Panama.

Discovery

During his fourth and last trip in 1502 to the Americas, Christopher Columbus first landed in Honduras on the island of

Guanaja, which he is said to have named. He then continued to the coastal area, landing on the American mainland for the first time at the tip of the Bay Trujillo, which he named Punta Caxinas, and where the first mass held in America was celebrated. From Trujillo, Columbus continued his exploration in the northeastern coastal area.

> *According to historians, upon finding shelter from a storm in a pronounced cape area, Columbus exclaimed, "Gracias a Dios que hemos salido de estas honduras!" or "Thank God we escaped from the depths," which resulted in the name of the area as Gracias a Dios and the country as Honduras.*

Although Columbus did encounter some natives, he did not continue his explorations in Honduras.

La Conquista

Spanish conquistadores did not become interested in colonization of Honduras until **Cristobal de Olid** established the first European colony in Triunfo de la Cruz, near present-day Tela, in 1524. A previous expedition was headed by Gil González Dávila to the Pacific Coast of Honduras, who named the Golfo Fonseca after Bishop Rodríguez de Fonseca in 1523.

Colonization of the newly discovered territory did not go smoothly. Strife among the colonizers began when de Olid tried to convert his colony into an independent state. De Olid, himself an emissary of Hernando de Cortés, the Mexican conqueror, was finally murdered on Cortés's orders to regain control of the settlement. In 1525, Cortés traveled to Honduras and moved the colony to Trujillo. Cortés was able to establish his authority, as well as subdue rebellious indigenous populations. However, the appointment of Diego López de Salcedo as the first royal governor caused renewed troubles, as local indigenous groups revolted against

his policies and Nicaraguan authorities imprisoned him after he tried to extend his jurisdiction into Nicaragua. Although a border was defined and he was released, López de Salcedo did not return to Honduras until 1529.

During the early 1530s, the colony was nearly abandoned due to increased fighting among the Spaniards, revolts, and the decline of the local population from disease, exploitation, and exportation as slaves to nearby Caribbean islands. In 1534, the area was renamed **Honduras-Higueras**. Higueras was comprised of western Honduras, while the remaining area was known as Honduras. In 1536, a Spanish authority, Don Pedro de Alvarado from Guatemala, accompanied by Guatemalan natives, developed the gold mining industry in the town of Gracias, in western Honduras. He also founded the city of San Pedro de Puerto Caballos, today San Pedro Sula.

In 1537, a capital was established in **Comayagua** in central Honduras, and this remained the political and religious center of the country for 350 years, until **Tegucigalpa** became the capital in 1880.

Lord of the Mountain

The discovery of mineral deposits increased settlement in the new colony and the demand for labor. But the local populations revolted against the enforced labor and, in 1537, a major uprising of 30,000 strong was led by **Lempira**, a young Lenca cacique (chief), of the central highlands.

Lempira means "Lord or gentleman of the mountain" in the Lenca language.

Lempira planned to expel the Spaniards from the territory and insurrections arose in San Pedro and Comayagua, and even as far away as Trujillo. Lempira was able to successfully resist the Spanish forces led by Captain Alonso de Cáceres, from his fortified hill base, Peñol de Cerquin, until 1538. When the Spaniards were unable to put down the revolt through force, they resorted to trickery, and Lempira was treacherously shot and murdered by a Spanish emissary

while negotiating for peace. Thus, the Spanish conquest was complete and the territory firmly established. Today, Lempira is a national symbol of independence; the Department of Lempira, where he resided, was named after him and the national currency is the lempira.

Lempira's defeat was the end of indigenous resistance. Local populations continued to decline and in just two short years, from 1537 to 1539, their numbers decreased from an estimated 15,000 to a mere 8,000. The Spanish "encomienda" system, which allowed native people to live in their villages under the control of individual Spanish settlers, only managed to further decimate the local population, and lead to a clash between Spanish authorities and the Roman Catholic Church. Under the "encomienda" system, the settlers were supposed to provide the natives with religious instruction and collect taxes from them. But, as the population continued to decrease, the settlers increased their exploitation in an effort to maintain levels of tribute for the crown. Opposition to the system led by **Father Cristóbal de Pedraza**, who in 1542 became the first bishop of Honduras, was not very successful.

Mining Era

After Lempira's defeat, settlement in the province expanded and economic activities increased. Agriculture and cattle ranching were established, but the main activity in Honduras was mining. In the 1540s, silver was discovered in the Río Guayape Valley, shifting the economic center of the colony from Gracias, the initial gold center, to Comayagua. More gold deposits were discovered near San Pedro Sula and Trujillo. Increased mining activities created a need for labor. Due to the near-extermination of local populations, African slaves were imported and at one time it is estimated that there were nearly 2,000 slaves.

It appeared that Honduras was headed for prosperity. Unfortunately for the province, when mining production declined in 1560s, and after the Captaincy General of Central America, or Spanish governmental unit was moved from Gracias in Honduras to Antigua, Guatemala in 1544, Honduras lost importance in the larger scheme.

In 1569, new silver strikes in the small mountain town of Tegucigalpa produced a surge in the economy, shifting importance from Comayagua. The silver boom waned out in 1584, however, and the territory once again fell into economic decline.

By the 17th century, Honduras was a poor and neglected province of the Spanish Colonial empire.

Although mining activities still provided the major source of revenue and cattle ranching increased, during the 17th and 18th centuries, economic decline and foreign attacks led to the abandonment of several municipal governments. Much of the country remained un-colonized. By the end of the 17th century, only Comayagua, with 144 families, and Tegucigalpa, with 135, had over 100 Spanish settlers. Isolation, smuggling, and corruption made governance of the province of Honduras a tedious task indeed.

When the Bourbon Dynasty began in the early 18th century, the administration of the Spanish colonies was revamped in an effort towards a more efficient administration. Tax reductions revived the mining in Honduras in the 1730s. In 1787, corrupt government units were replaced with the "intendencias" system, a royal official who controlled tax collection and commerce, and exercised some judicial functions.

Another problem faced by Spanish colonization was the British presence on the north coast. During the 16th century British pirates based on the Bay Islands preyed tirelessly on Spanish galleons of gold and silver shipments. The town of Trujillo was attacked so many times that it was abandoned for over a century.

The English were more interested in trading and lumbering than mining. They brought settlers of African descent from Jamaica and other West Indies islands to harvest the timber. Africans and Miskitos (natives of the Gracias a Dios' area), who supported the British efforts, were much more willing to attack the Spaniards than other native groups. Settlements along the north coast and the Bay Islands threatened Spanish hegemony by cutting off its access to the Caribbean coast. However, the Spanish, under the revitalized Bourbon administration, were able to regain control of the area. In 1752, they

built the San Fernando de Omoa Fort and 1780 they returned to Trujillo and established a base from where they attacked British settlements. They regained control of the Bay Islands and drove English settlers out of the Miskito area. The Convention of 1786 gave definitive recognition of Spanish sovereignty over the Caribbean coast.

Independence

Early in the 19th century, Spanish rule started to decline when Napoleon Bonaparte forced the King of Spain to abdicate and took over the Spanish throne in 1808. Throughout Latin American, political upheaval broke out. Increased taxes to pay for Spain's war against the French nearly bankrupted the Honduran cattle industry. Further disturbances sparked by the rivalry between Comayagua and Tegucigalpa reached a peak in 1812, which resulted in the reestablishment of the municipal government in Tegucigalpa. Civil strife was avoided only when a decision was made by all the Central American nations to declare independence from Spain on September 15, 1821. However, the rivalry between the cities continued. Comayagua urged unification with the Empire of Mexico, while Tegucigalpa supported the creation of a unified Central American state. In early 1822, all the Central American provinces joined the Empire of Mexico, ruled under General Augustín de Iturbide. The empire did not last very long. In March 1823, Iturbide was overthrown, and the empire dissolved. In 1824, the Central American Congress convened in Guatemala and declared independence from Mexico through the creation of the **Federal Republic of the United Provinces of Central America**, which included Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

The Republic faced trouble from the outset. Most of the region was wary of Guatemala's desire for domination and would not cede power to a central government. At the same time, liberal and conservative political factions were born. The conservatives favored a government based on the traditional Spanish structure of centralized government, while the liberals preferred the political and economic models of the United States and Western Europe. The conservatives wished to maintain indigenous peoples in a subservient role, while the liberals

wanted to absorb them into the mainstream Hispanic culture. As a result, civil war broke out in the region.

Honduras at the time was one of the poorer provinces in the region, with an estimated population of just 137,000. It was also almost devoid of cultural development, possessing no printing press, newspapers, or university at the time of independence. Nonetheless, despite this meagerness – or perhaps because of it – Honduras produced two of the most prominent thinkers of the time. **Jose Cecilio del Valle**, a conservative statesmen, also known as "el Sabio," or "the learned, wise one." Del Valle drafted the Declaration of Independence from Spain. And then there was liberal thinker General Francisco Morazán, military strategist and politician.

General Francisco Morazán

Francisco Morazán, who became known as the "George Washington of Central America," was born October 3, 1792 in Tegucigalpa. He was the last president of the Federal Republic of United Provinces of Central America formed in 1823 under the presidency of conservative Manuel J. Arce. An adept military strategist, Morazán began his military career when he enlisted in Tegucigalpa's volunteer forces. In 1824, he was named Chief of State under President Dionisio de Herrera, a post he held until 1826 when he was named President of the Representative Council. Between 1827 and 1829, he led the forces against Arce in both El Salvador and Guatemala, overthrowing Arce and the conservative movement. In 1830, he was elected by popular vote to the presidency of the Federation, defeating his conservative opponent Jose Cecilio del Valle. In 1934, del Valle defeated Morazán in the elections, but died before taking office, and Morazán continued as President. During what was known as the "Restoration" period, he initiated reforms to what were then semi-feudal structures, but against many obstacles: provincial differences, military ambitions, church oppositions, international pressures, financial bankruptcy, and criticism of government corruption and nepotism. Unfortunately, the reforms were

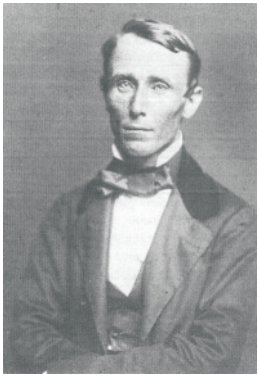
short-lived. In 1837, a conservative uprising in Guatemala began and by 1838 the federation dissolved.

On July 7, 1938, the Central American Congress divested Morazán of his office and declared that the individual states could establish their governments as "sovereign, free, and independent political bodies." Morazán was later exiled when he tried to overthrow the new regime. He tried to reestablish the Federation from Costa Rica, but was captured and executed by a firing squad in San José, Costa Rica on September 15, 1842.

> **Historic Footnote:** The first round of shots fired at General Morazán during his execution missed, and according to historians, when Morazán realized he hadn't been hit, he turned to the firing squad and said, "I'm not dead yet." He was successfully executed by the second round.

A Nation at Last

Since independence, government leadership has alternated between two political groups and military regimes. When the federation dissolved, rivalry between the political factions had produced both economic and political instability. Relations between the government and the church were also strained and in 1842 most of the church's property was confiscated. The British took advantage of the situation and reestablished a protectorate over the Bay Islands and the Moskitia region, even managing to take control of Trujillo at one point.



The infighting between the conservative and liberal parties was forgotten only for a short time when the famed filibuster **William Walker** appeared on the scene and attempted to take over Central America. In 1856, he named himself President of Nicaragua. The Central American armies joined forces to oppose Walker and in 1857, he was forced to abandon the

area and return to the United States. In 1860, Walker returned to Central America planning to overthrow Honduran President Guardiola. When he landed in Trujillo in 1860, he was faced by strong opposition from joint British and Honduran forces. He surrendered to the British, who handed him over to local authorities. He was executed a few days later and is still buried in Trujillo.

Liberal Reforms

Elected president in 1876, **Dr. Marco Aurelio Soto** is considered the father of modern government because of the reforms he initiated that consolidated basic government structure. By organizing the tax system, agrarian politics, mining, and communications, he was able to propel Honduras into global markets by exporting sugarcane, coffee, bananas, and ore. These developments, together with foreign investment, led to improved road and railway systems, and the creation of public services such as the post office and telegraphy. He also made some advances in the educational sector by offering free grade school. Unfortunately, at the time Spanish was considered a superior language and instruction was only offered in Spanish, which resulted in the eventual loss of several native languages. At the same time, Soto perpetuated internal strife by moving the capital of Honduras from Comayagua to Tegucigalpa in 1880.

Internal conflicts continued to rule the political scene until the end of the century, when foreign banana producing companies were established. In 1899, the government granted the first major concession to the Vacarro Brothers, which would later become the **Standard Fruit Company**. In 1907, the Cuyamel Fruit Company began operations and was later bought by the United Fruit Company. Then President Manuel Bonilla granted the foreign companies enormous tax exemptions as well as permits to build wharves, roads, and railways. Thus, throughout the first half of the last century, these companies were able to dominate both internal politics and, consequently, the Honduran economy.

Relatively speaking, **President Bonilla** was a successful president. He attempted to reorganize the conservatives into a "national party." The present-day National Party of Honduras (Partido Nacional de Honduras – PNH) traces its origins to his administration. He was also able to improve some internal conditions, most notably the road from Tegucigalpa to the Pacific coast. He built the National Theater in Tegucigalpa. In addition, he signed a friendship pact with neighboring countries. Perhaps his greatest accomplishment was the long disputed delineation of the border between Nicaragua and Honduras in 1906. However, Nicaragua revived the dispute in 1912 with new objections. The matter wasn't settled for good until 1960 and in favor of the 1906 arbitration. The same year Bonilla was successful in resisting a Guatemalan invasion, which arose from the friendship pact signed with Guatemala and El Salvador and which was taken as an anti-Nicaraguan alliance by the Nicaraguans. Nicaragua's President Zelaya began supporting exiled liberals who were attempting to overthrow Bonilla. In February 1907, the exiles invaded Honduras with the help of the Nicaraguan army and established a provisional junta.

Civil strife continued throughout the first half of the century, with increased intervention in Honduras by the United States Government interested in protecting banana company interests in the country and preventing war between the different Central American countries. In just three years, from 1920 through 1923, there were 17 uprisings or attempted coups in Honduras.

The banana industry also saw the beginning of organized labor; the first workers' strike against the Cuyamel Fruit Company was held in 1917. In 1920, a major strike along the entire north coast was squashed only when the US sent a warship to the area and the Honduran government began arresting union leaders. By 1924, the banana industry had gained control of the country's railways, major factories, utilities and had even established their own banks.

Internal conflicts continued with only a brief respite from 1925 to 1930, when Honduras became the world's leading banana exporter, and the road to economic prosperity seemed foreseeable. Unfortunately, the onset of the Great Depression

and the consequent decrease in banana exports, which caused thousands of workers to be laid off and wages to be reduced, produced civil unrest.

Dictatorship

National Party leader **Tiburcio Carias Andino**, a strong-handed dictator, led Honduras from 1932 to 1948, the longest period of any leader to date. Although he did win the election for his first term of office, the following three terms were achieved by revising the constitution every time his term was about to end. Carias Andino's tenure did bring a relative period of peace, and financial disasters brought on by the Depression and worker's movements were depressed.

Protest against the foreign companies culminated in 1954, when a country-wide labor strike spurred by dock workers brought about a series of social reforms that allowed the existence of labor unions, associations, and cooperatives, which were developed to protect the worker's rights.

Coup d'État

Internal conflict continued and in 1956, the first military coup took place. This historic event propelled military forces to a new status among the powers that be.

In 1957, a civilian returned to power when Liberal **Ramón Villeda Morales** won the election. During his term of office, the first of the agrarian reforms granted property to the landless farmers. Land had become scarce during the 1940s due to the rapid expansion of agricultural exports. While coffee farms were small-scale, cotton plantations and cattle ranches required huge swathes of land and would illegally enclose public lands to meet their needs. But Villeda's reforms were not favored by either party, who were influenced by the new agricultural export kings; or by the military when he promised to abolish military autonomy and established the Civil Guard, which was controlled by the Liberal Party.

Consequently, the military joined forces with the National Party and carried out a second coup in 1963, when **Oswaldo Lopez Arellano** took power with the support of National Party President Ricardo Zuniga Agustinus.

Soccer War

In 1969, a four-day war between Honduras and El Salvador, which was sparked by the eviction of thousands of Salvadoran immigrants in search of land. It was dubbed by the international press as the "Soccer War." Lopez Arellano had ordered the expulsions as one of the measures aimed at solving the land scarcity crisis; he also allowed some *campesino* (farmer) groups to retake enclosed public properties.

At the same time, mounting tensions between the two countries culminated during the 1970 Soccer World Cup qualifying matches, in which both countries were participating. Honduras won the first match held in Tegucigalpa, with a 1-0 score. Unfortunately, Salvadoran nationals booed during the Honduran national anthem and attacked visiting fans during the second match held in San Salvador, which El Salvador won 3-0. The decisive match was never held as El Salvador launched an attack on Honduras on July 14, 1969 by bombing specific targets and sending troops over the border. Aggressions halted with the intervention of the Organization of American States (OAS), which negotiated a cease-fire on July 20 and, by August, Salvadoran troops had returned home. This short war marred relations between the two countries for over a decade. Land redistribution continued, though, and by 1975, 20% of those identified as landless had received some property.

Lopez was ousted in 1974 under suspicion of taking a bribe from the United Fruit Company to suspend export taxes. Military regimes under Melgar Castro and Policarpo Paz Bonilla ruled the country until 1981. Although the military rule was to a certain extent oppressive, dialogue with the popular sectors in Honduras was maintained. Land redistribution continued at a slower pace but did not cease. Trade unions were still able to demand wage increases. Basic civil rights remained intact and there were few human rights abuses.

At the urging of US President Carter's administration and with promises of substantial financial aid, General Policarpo

Paz Garcia agreed to cede his power to a democratically elected government. In 1981, with over an 80% turnout, a virtually unknown country doctor, Liberal **Roberto Suazo Cordova** beat National Party old-timer Ricardo Zuniga Agustinus in the bid for the Presidency of Honduras.

Contragate

During the 1980s, Honduras was surrounded by turmoil. Civil wars and uprisings raged in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. This factor made Honduras the focus of US policy and operations in the region. The Sandinista victory of the Nicaraguan revolution and leftist insurgency in El Salvador were perceived as part of a growing Communist threat.

Dr. Suazo Cordova, although a practiced politician, had little experience on the international front. Instead of attempting to reduce military might in favor of the democratic process, he embraced US policies at the urging of General Gustavo Alvarez Martinez. During the Reagan administration, military aid to Honduras rose from $3.9 million in 1980 to $77.5 million in 1984, , much of which purportedly originated from the illegal sale of arms in Iran. While some of the money was used to increase the number of Honduran troops, buy equipment, and provide training, most was destined for activities destabilizing the Sandinista Regime in Nicaragua. Nicaraguan Contras (counter-revolutionaries) were trained in Honduras and covert operations into Nicaragua were funded. The US also trained Salvadoran military in Honduras to assist in combating the civil uprising in El Salvador.

Dirty War

General Alvarez, the Commander in Chief of the armed forces, was trained in Argentina in the 1970s. As a diehard anti-Communist, Alvarez had been aiding Nicaraguan Contras of his own accord since 1980. He was also committed to eliminating the small leftist guerilla groups that had formed in Honduras. Soon after taking office, he created the infamous Battalion 3-16, a clandestine military death squad, which, together with other police forces of the time, carried out torture and execution of the members of these groups, as well as anyone providing support to leftist rebels in El Salva-

dor. Members of the death squad and police forces also infiltrated unions, student organizations and any other group suspected of radical political beliefs. A later human rights commission report credited the military with disappearance of 184 people. In comparison with neighboring countries, the number of persons who "disappeared" in Honduras seems almost insignificant. Nevertheless, such violent actions were not congruent with traditional government problem solving.

Fortunately in 1984, General Alvarez was ousted from power by his own officers in a bloodless military coup. US intervention continued even after the exile of Alvarez, and in 1986 military aid to Honduras recorded an all time high of $81.1 million. Human rights violations did decline though and political instability gave rise to huge anti-US protests in Tegucigalpa, in conjunction with the Iran-Contra scandal. Finally, in 1990, Violetta Chamorro won the election in Nicaragua and US troops in Honduras were gradually recalled.

The Democratic Process

A weak President, Suazo Cordova failed to make any substantial gains toward democracy during his term of office, rather fomenting corruption and spending. Still, only popularly elected Presidents have ruled the country since. During the 1990s, the military was nearly completely divested of its powers and budget, mainly when everyone – the public and private sectors and the US government – got tired of supporting a corrupt and costly obstacle to democracy. Military forces were downsized and government institutions such as the phone company were privatized. Financial austerity measures are now in place; neo-liberal policies favoring a free market economy are being implemented. As Honduras qualified for the Highly Indebted Poor Country initiative; the country's debt payments will be destined to favor social and education programs as a means of eliminating poverty.

HURRICANE MITCH

In 1998, Hurricane Mitch struck Honduras, almost completely wiping out infrastructure on the Island of Guanaja before moving to the mainland. Coastal cities suffered severe destruction, while farther in-

land heavy rains on deforested hillsides caused landslides and floods, which destroyed a large portion of the country's infrastructure, washing away bridges and roads and, in some cases, entire villages. It caused severe damages in Tegucigalpa. Fortunately, the enormous amount of international aid received allowed for most everything to be rebuilt by the year 2002, and little of the damage remains visible today.

■ The Land

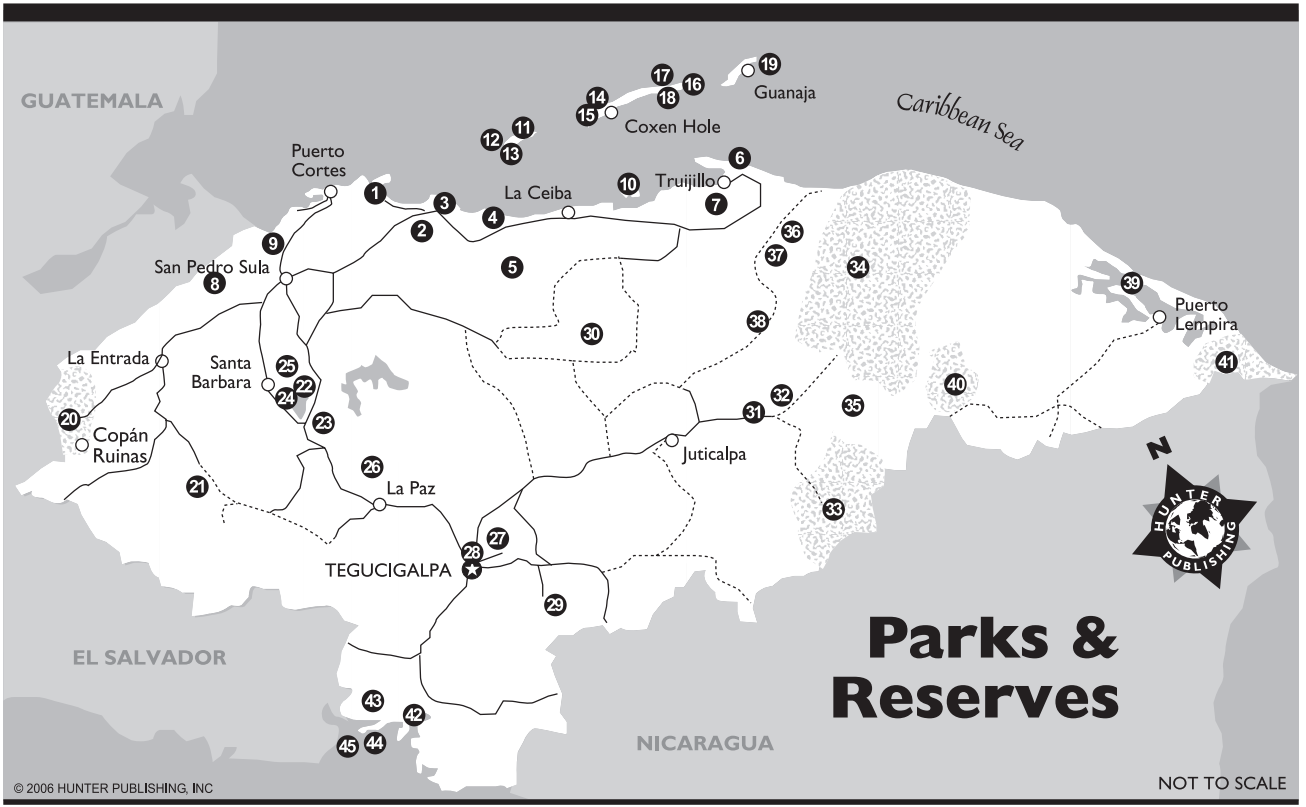
Approximately 1,000 miles southwest of Miami, in the middle of the Central American isthmus, Honduras is flanked by the Caribbean Sea to the north and the Pacific Ocean to the south.

Coastal flatlands and fertile valleys are interspersed by vast mountain ranges that host 64 different ecosystems.

The second-largest country in Central America, with an area of 43,277 square miles, Honduras borders Nicaragua to the east and southeast, Guatemala to the west and El Salvador to the southwest.

The northern Atlantic coastline of the country boasts a 475-mile-long shore, characterized by humid tropical forests, lagoons, and mangrove systems. Several small bays, such as those found in Omoa, Puerto Cortes, Ulua, La Ceiba, and Trujillo, one of the deepest bays in Central America, dot the coastline, serving as harbors. In the northeast lies the **Caratasca Lagoon**, the largest in the country. The broad Caribbean basin known as the **Gulf of Honduras** is bordered by Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize. Off the northern coast in the Caribbean are the **Bay Islands**, the **Hog Islands** and, farther east, the **Swan Islands**.

The northeastern corner of Honduras is dominated by a region known as the **Moskitia**, covering an area of 8,500 square miles. It holds one of the largest, intact tracts of rainforest on the isthmus and is sometimes referred to as the Central American Amazon. Not accessible by road, travel to the Moskitia can be accomplished only by plane or small sea ves-


GUATEMALA
Caribbean Sea
Guanaja
Coxen Hole
Puerto Cortes
La Ceiba
Truijillo
San Pedro Sula
La Entrada
Santa Barbara
Copán Ruinas
Puerto Lempira
Juticalpa
La Paz
TEGUCIGALPA
EL SALVADOR
NICARAGUA
Parks & Reserves
N
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NOT TO SCALE

NORTH COAST
1. Jeannette Kawas National Park
2. Lancetilla Botanical Gardens
3. Punto Izopo National Park
4. Cuero y Salado Wildlife Reserve
5. Pico Bonito National Park
6. Guaimoreto Wildlife Refuge
7. Capiro y Calentura National Park
8. Cusuco National Park
9. Merendon Mountain Range

THE BAY ISLANDS
10. Cayoc Cochinos National Marine Park
11. Turtle Harbor Wildlife Refuge
12. Raggedy Key Wildlife Refuge
13. Utila National Marine Park
14. Sandy Bay National Marine Park
15. West End Wildlife Refuge
16. Barbareta Wildlife Refuge
17. Port Royal National Marine Park
18. Saint Helen Biosphere Reserve
19. Manglar Wildlife Refuge

COPAN & THE WESTERN HIGHLANDS
20. Copán Ruins Archaeological Park World Heritage Site
21. Celaque National Park
22. Los Naranjos Eco-Archaeological Park
23. Cerro Azul Meambar National Park
24. Santa Bárbara Mountain National Park
25. Pulhapanzak Waterfall

CENTRAL HONDURAS
26. Comoyagua Mountain National Park

TEGUCIGALPA & SOUTHEAST HONDURAS
27. La Tigra National Park
28. United Nations Park (El Picacho)
29. Yuscarán Biological Reserve

OLANCHO & LA MOSKITIA
30. La Muralla National Park
31. El Boquerón National Monument
32. Talgua Caves Archaeological Park
33. Patuca National Park
34. Rio Plátano Biosphere Reserve
35. Tawahka Asagni Biosphere Reserve
36. Rio Tinto Mountain Range National Forest
37. El Carbón National Park
38. Sierra de Agalta National Park
39. Caratacsa Wildlife Reserve
40. Rus Rus Biological Reserve
41. Rio Kruta Biological Reserve

SOUTH HONDURAS
42. San Lorenzo Wildlife Refuge
43. Bahía de Chismuyo Wildlife Reserve
44. Golf of Fonseca Archipelago National Marine Park
45. Isla de Tigre

sel. Teeming with tropical wildlife, open coasts, estuaries, river valleys, flood plains, fresh-water swamps, lagoons and mangroves grace this isolated region that contains six protected areas.

To the south, the 100-mile Pacific shore, bordered by a mere 25-mile-wide flatland, is bound by the Golf of Fonseca. Honduran islands in the Golf include **Isla del Tigre** and **Zacate Grande**, which were once volcanoes forming part of a chain of volcanoes that extends along the Pacific Coast of Central America. Differing from other Central American nations, no volcanic activity exists in Honduras. Inland areas are dominated by mountains, which comprise 65% of the country's surface. A central depression divides the country's mountain ranges in two, the Atlantic or Eastern range, where most of the valley's are located, and the Pacific or western range that runs along the border with El Salvador directly to the Golf of Fonseca. Pine forests dominate the western range, while continuous areas of broadleaf forests interspersed by pine savannahs and coastal wetlands grace the east.

Celaque Mountain in western Honduras is the highest peak standing, at 9,347 feet. Prominent northern peaks include **Montaña de la Flor** at 7,545 feet, and **Pico Bonito** (Pretty Peak) in La Ceiba on the north coast at 7,988 feet

Cloud forests (defined as mountaintops that are covered with clouds or rain for more than 70% of the year) are found in about 40 mountains in Honduras. These forests are formed by pine and broadleaf forests, between 100 and 150 feet high, usually containing a large number of epiphytes.

Rivers & Lakes

Rivers provide an abundant supply of water in Honduras. The **Ulúa River** is one of the largest, flowing north nearly 250 miles (400 km) from the Comayagua plain through the fertile Sula Valley to the Caribbean Sea. Farther east, the **Aguán River** runs through the heavily farmed Aguán Valley into the Atlantic.

Other major rivers originating in the eastern Moskitia area also empty north into the Caribbean. The 72-mile (115-km)

Plátano River, runs through Río Plátano Biosphere Reserve. The **Patuca River** (310 miles/500 km), one of the longest rivers in Central American spanning three protected areas, meanders through pine savannahs and thick tropical forests. The **Tinto**, another rainforest river, runs through the Río Tinto National Park. All three of these waterways provide a way of life for local indigenous populations, most of whom live along riverbanks. They serve as a food source and in some areas they're the only transportation routes.

Río Coco or **Segovia**, the longest river in Central America, defines nearly half the border between Nicaragua and Honduras. The **Goascorán** and **Lempa Rivers** flow south into the Golfo de Fonseca and define parts of the border between El Salvador and Honduras.

Lake Yojoa

Lago de Yojoa is in central western Honduras, about an hour from San Pedro Sula. Nestled in the mountains alongside Cerro Santa Barbara, the country's second-highest peak, Lake Yojoa is the only natural, fresh-water lake in Honduras. Measuring 14 miles long and nine miles wide (23 x 15 km), Lake Yojoa receives more rain than any other region in Honduras, with an average annual rainfall of nearly 160 inches (2,300 to 3,200 mm).

In 1954, Tela Railroad Company executives and scientists introduced black bass into the lake for sport fishing purposes. The bass prospered and, for several decades, fishermen from all over world came in search of record-breaking catches. Unfortunately, the bass eliminated the native species. Today, several tilapia fisheries have sprung up in the lake. Although bass are still plentiful, larger specimens are now rare. Enjoy a meal of either bass or tilapia at one of the eateries lining the road that runs alongside this beautiful lake.

■ Climate

There are only two seasons in Honduras, the rainy season from May to November and the dry season from November to May. This is not to say it doesn't rain during the dry season. On the Atlantic coast, it can rain anytime, and in areas near Lake

Yojoa it rains nearly every day. But dry season rain does not compare to rainy season downpours, which in some areas can last for days.

Northern coastal areas receive nearly 100 inches (2,540 mm) of annual rainfall, whereas central highlands average 40 inches (1,000 mm) a year. The south coast is the driest area and can receive as little 15 inches (381 mm) of rain during drought years.

The temperature in Honduras differs according to elevation, and while lowland coastal areas can reach extremely high temperatures of 100°F (38°C) or more, they usually average 82-90°F (28-32°C). Fortunately, temperatures cool at higher altitudes farther inland. In Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, the weather is close to perfect, averaging between 75-85°F (24-30°C). Freezing can occur in areas 2,000 feet (600 m) and higher. However, the weather is never so cold as to be inhospitable.

■ The Rainforest

Rainforests are the earth's oldest living ecosystems and Honduras forms part of the world's largest tropical rainforest area, the **Neotropical Realm**. The Neotropics extend from Mexico and the Caribbean, throughout Central America all the way to Ecuador in South America. Characterized by hot weather, high humidity, abundant rainfall, a canopy structure and rich biodiversity, tropical rainforests are some of the hottest, wettest, most densely populated areas on earth.

> **Fact:** While rainforests cover only about 5% of the earth's surface, 40 to 50% of all known life forms, many of them endemic, inhabit a rainforest.

Species richness or biodiversity means diversity within a species. One example is with orchids. In Honduras, a country approximately the size of Tennessee, there are 640 species of orchids. In all of Europe, there are only 260. Snakes are another example; Honduras has 111 species of snakes, Canada only 22. Vast northern temperate woodlands usually con-

tain six to 20 different tree species. In Honduras, 117 different species of trees were counted in 2½ acres of rainforest.

> **What's in a word?** Endemic species are native to and confined to a certain region, which means they are found nowhere else in the world. So far, 244 plant, 16 reptile and one bird species have been identified as endemic to Honduras.

At each level, the forest canopy supports different life forms that have adapted in unique and wonderful ways over the ages, forming delicate and species-rich ecosystems.

One such adaptation is the way plants directly absorb and store nutrients themselves; the soil quality found in the rainforest would not support them. An idiosyncrasy of rainforest abundance is a poor, thin layer of topsoil. Abundant rainfall and the heat in mature forests have been leaching out mineral nutrients for thousands of years. But perfectly tailored bacteria and fungi speed up the decomposition of dead material for efficient absorption by the plants.

Crown Shyness & Other Forms of Pest Control

Because of the continuous cover they provide, canopy trees appear to be very close to one another. But, even though their branches may overlap, canopy trees very rarely touch one another and are usually separated by a few feet. This phenomenon is known as crown shyness. Why this occurs is unknown. One theory suggests that it prevents branches from banging into each other on windy days; another that it is a natural form of pest control against insects and tree diseases.

Other ways trees protect themselves from pests are by producing tannins and other chemicals that ward off plant eaters. When these chemicals are washed to the ground by the rain, they are poisonous to other plants as well, thus preserving the tree's space. Cecropia or trumpet trees host biting ants in their hollow leaf stems; the ants clean the tree and protect it from leaf-cutter ants and other herbivores, while the tree provides shelter and produces special food-bodies

along the underside of the stems. Passionflower vines camouflage themselves by forming tiny growths that mimic the bright yellow appearance of Heliconius butterfly eggs. The Heliconius female assumes the leaf is already in use and avoids laying her eggs there for fear the leaf would be weighed down with too many eggs.

Rainforest Layers

The forest canopy is divided into five levels, often undistinguishable from one another.

The Upper or Over-Story: The over-story is the crown of emergents or giant trees, which soars from 130 to 250 feet (40 to 75 m) above the canopy. Only one or two emergents usually occur per acre of rainforest. **Harpy eagles** live in the upper-story, where they build huge nests of sticks and branches in the tallest trees. One of the largest eagles in the world, a harpy eagle can measure four feet tall and weigh up to 20 pounds with a wingspan up to seven feet. Their feet are as big as a man's hand and their talons as long as a grizzly bear's. This majestic bird has excellent eyesight and is so powerful it is able to snatch sloths out of the canopy, even when the sloth has a tight grip on a tree. Its diet consists of small mammals, such as monkeys and opossums, as well as large birds.

The Canopy: The canopy consists of flat-crowned trees and their branches, which form a continuous forest cover that captures most of the sunlight and absorbs the impact of the wind and rain. The emergent and canopy trees have shallow roots that form large bases called triangle buttresses or prop roots, allowing them a firm hold in the thin soil. Buttress roots are long, thin extensions of the trunk that begin farther up the trunk, about 20 feet from the ground. The canopy is teeming with both animal and plant life. The most common plant species found are epiphytes, which grow on the tree branches in search of sunlight. **Epiphytes** are plants that grow on a host, but that are not parasites, rather feeding on nutrients found in the air, falling rain and compost formed on tree branches. The most common known epiphytes are ferns, orchids, vines, and bromeliads. Although epiphytes are found in rainforests at all altitudes, they are more abundant in cloud forests.

Vines also are a common sight in the rainforest. Lianas are wood climbers with up to 10-inch diameters that connect trees, providing rainforest creatures mobility among the trees. Strangler figs begin life as epiphytes that send roots down to the soil. As they grow, they envelope their hosts, which eventually die from the shade of the fig's copious branches and leaves. The figs eventually become freestanding trees, as the original tree decomposes.

Birds, bats and other flying creatures inhabit the canopy. Some species that normally live on the forest floor, such as mice and snakes, nest in canopy tree branches. **Brown-throated three-toed sloths** live in the canopy layer thriving on a diet of leaves. Living in the trees, they prefer the leaves found on the crowns of mature trees and rarely come down to the ground, which makes them arboreal folivores. In fact, they spend most of their time hanging upside-down in the canopy. **Spider monkeys**, another arboreal species, also live in the canopy. They get their name from the way they use their tails to swing through the trees. Often called the five-limbed monkey, their tails are more mobile and dexterous than any other monkey. They live on rainforest fruits and roam the forest in small groups of up to 20 in search of food.

The Lower or Under-Story: The under-story refers to the smaller tree species, and younger canopy and emergent specimens that are more widely spaced and form a broken layer beneath the canopy. Under-story trees usually have larger leaves than the taller trees to help them absorb more of the little available light that seeps through the canopy.

The Shrub Layer: The shrub layer is comprised of shrubs growing only 20 to 30 feet (six to nine m) high and young trees. This layer does not receive as much light as upper layers and is not dense.

The Forest Floor: The forest floor or herb layer is the ground layer of the forest, which contains tree trunks, fungus and low-growing vegetation. While temperatures at canopy levels tend to vary, as the canopy receives most of the sunlight and wind, the air of sheltered forest floors tends to be still and temperatures constant. Most people assume the forest floor is impassable with undergrowth, when in fact the opposite is true. Mature forests let in very little sunlight and, while some

growth does occur, forest floors are interspersed with dark, open spaces.

Not every rainforest has all of these characteristics and, as in Honduras, many blend with adjacent mangroves as well as mountain forests.

Honduras Forest Systems

Some 60% of Honduran territory is comprised of forest systems, which form part of 64 different ecosystems. These are home to nearly 8,000 plant species, 1,400 tree species, 229 reptiles, 228 mammal species, and over 700 species of birds.

There are five main types of forests in Honduras:

Needleleaf forests, in which seven different species of pine have been identified, are the most extensive. Pine forests in Honduras occur at all altitudes. Lowland or flatland pine savannahs are found along the Atlantic, while other species flourish at intermediate levels and on the higher mountain peaks further inland.

The Atlantic slope, which is covered by **lowland and sub-montane broadleaf rainforests**, contains the country's richest biodiversity. Examples of these forests can be found in the Río Plátano Biosphere and the Tawahka Reserve in the Moskitia Region; and in more accessible areas along the north coast such as the Pico Bonito National Park in La Ceiba, the Texiguat Reserve in Tela, and the Capiro and Calentura National Park in Trujillo.

Cloud forests come in three types – broadleaf, pine and mixed alti-montane. Broadleaf cloud forests are found only in El Cusuco National Park, near San Pedro and the Yoro Mountain Park in Yoro. Mixed altimontane cloud forests, are found only on the highest peaks, such as Pico Bonito.

Tropical dry forests are found along the Pacific coast of Central America. These habitats endure a prolonged dry season of five to eight months and their broadleaf canopy trees tend to be smaller than moist tropical forests. Despite the lack of exuberant foliage, biological diversity is still present, as is a significant degree of endemism. Some bird species endemic to the Pacific slope of Central America include the white-bellied chachalaca, the blue-tailed hummingbird, and the giant wren.

Mangrove forests can be found in all of the north coast wetland reserves and the south coast mangrove systems have received international recognition for their international importance.

Rainforest Biodiversity

Rainforests are vital for sustaining life as we know it. They house 50% of the world's plant and animal species, as well as many migratory birds. They are also home to nearly 50 million indigenous people of a multitude of cultures, who depend on the rainforest.

Some 25% of the pharmaceuticals we use today originated in a rainforest, as did much of the food we consume, such as avocados, bananas, black pepper, cashews, cayenne, chocolate, cloves, cinnamon, citrus fruits, coconuts, coffee, eggplant, guava, mangos, millet, palm oil, passion fruits, pineapples, peppers, rice, tomatoes, sugarcane, vanilla, water chestnuts, and yams.

Trees in the rainforest produce more fruits, seeds, flowers, and leaves than those found in more temperate climates. Thus, rainforests are an important source of genetic material, which is essential for sustaining the high yields of modern crops. This can be attributed to the enormous amount of leaves produced at the canopy level, which create a high rate of photosynthesis, and consequently an abundance of plant life. Prolific flora in turn attracts and supports an array of wildlife in the rainforest.

Climate Control

Rainforests carry out an invaluable role in our climate. Scientists estimate that more than 20% of the world's oxygen is produced in the Amazon rainforest. This is because trees in the rainforest absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produce oxygen. By absorbing excess carbon dioxide, they act as carbon "sinks" against disproportionate levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the main culprit of global warming. Regional climates are also regulated by tropical rainforests as they prevent erosion, droughts, and flooding by absorbing rainfall and gradually releasing it into surrounding

watersheds. They also produce vital water supplies for the ever-growing human population.

Stresses to the Rainforest

The unsustainable practice of slash and burn agriculture, clear-cut forestry, over-grazing, extraction of natural resources, development and high population growth rates all cause stress on rainforests and, in some cases, kill them entirely.

The Consequences of Rainforest Loss

The loss of tropical rainforests implies the loss of biodiversity, important for the development of new medicines, foods and other products. Approximately 3,000 edible fruits are found in the rainforests, but only 200 are used worldwide. The US National Cancer Institute has identified 3,000 plants that are active against cancer cells; and 25% of the active ingredients in today's cancer drugs are derived from the rainforests.

The loss of tropical rainforest habitat means the loss of wildlife species such as migratory birds. According to the Audubon Society, about half of all the North American land birds, such as the colorful Baltimore oriole, migrate to rainforests. Surveys conducted since 1966 show a 54% decline of Texas' neotropical migratory species between 1980 and 1989 and Radar stations that detect birds migrating across the Gulf of Mexico each spring found that the number of flights – and presumably the number of birds – decreased by half from the 1960s to the 1980s.

"To travel is to live." H.C. Andersen, *My Life's Adventures*, 1855

■ Wildlife

While there is a great diversity of wildlife in Honduras, do not expect to see large herds of land mammals roaming the range. While some creatures, such as monkeys and deer, do hang out in groups, most rainforest mammals are solitary critters, who over the centuries have carved out their own little niche in the forest.

Land Mammals

There are 228 species of mammals in Honduras; most of these are land mammals and belong to the rodent or bat group. Some of the land mammals that live in Honduras are:

The Jaguar: The beautiful and elusive jaguar is the largest feline in the Americas. Adult males can reach an overall length of more than seven feet, and can weigh anywhere from 250 to 400 pounds. Jaguars are diurnal and will eat just about anything they are able to catch and kill by piercing the skull with powerful jaws. Once inhabiting an area ranging from the southern United States through Mexico and Central America all the way to Paraguay, the jaguar is no longer found in the US, and inhabits only the area from southern Mexico to southern Brazil. Deforestation has fragmented the rainforest, isolating jaguar populations and making them more vulnerable to man. Although the fur trade has been greatly reduced, cattle ranchers consider the jaguar a nuisance and shoot them on sight. It is improbable you will see a jaguar in the wild, but there are two magnificent specimens in Tegucigalpa's sorry excuse of a zoo. Both are males and they spend most of their time sleeping on tree trunks in their small cages or growling and clawing at each other through a screen. Nonetheless, they are enormous, beautiful creatures; and you get to see them very close up.

> **Did You Know?** The name jaguar comes from the ancient Indian name "yaguar," which meant "he who kills in one leap."

Giant Anteaters: Inhabiting the savannas, swamps, and moist forests of Central and South America, giant anteaters

are another example of perfect adaptation to rainforest environs. They are quite large, measuring up to six feet long, including the tail, and weighing about 55 pounds, with a shape perfectly adapted to foraging for insects. They have an elongated skull and a long, tubular snout ending in a small, toothless mouth. Their tongue is 24 inches long, perfect for sticking down anthills or into termite nests to gather prey, after which they crush them against their upper mouth. They have long, sharp claws, which they use to tear insect nests open. They protect these claws by walking on their knuckles. Their only enemies are large predators, such as jaguars, and when they are attacked they rear up on their hind legs, striking out with their sharp claws and with surprising agility.

Baird's Tapir: Tapirs are found in the neotropics as well as Southeast Asia. Their presence in the rainforest is vital to maintaining biodiversity because, as herbivores, they spread the seeds of the plants they eat. It is believed they originated millions of years ago because of their widespread geographic distribution. While they are closely related to horses and rhinos, they've been around a lot longer, and their bodies have changed so little over millions of years that they are called "living fossils." Tapirs can measure up to six feet long and weigh 350 to 800 pounds. They are particularly vulnerable to deforestation and loss of habitat because of their feeding habits. They also have one of the longest gestation periods of any mammal at 13 months. Tapirs have few predators, and despite their large size, they are strong and agile runners and will run into water when threatened. They are good swimmers and can also walk on the bottom of ponds and rivers.

Ocelots: Ocelots are small cats of yellow or gold with black spots and stripes. Although they look like margays, they are almost twice as big. Solitary, nocturnal predators, ocelots feed on deer, monkeys and other small animals. They mate any time of the year and, after the young are born, the male brings food to the female in the den.

Margays: Margays are the most accomplished climbers of all cats. Their ankle joints can turn 180° and they have special claws that help them run down tree trunks as well as upside-down on the bottom side of a branch. Although similar in appearance to the ocelot, margays are much smaller, with

longer legs and tail, often with less defined markings or rosettes. A nocturnal, solitary species, the margay hunts birds, small monkeys, frogs, insects, and even fruit in the forest canopy.

Jaguarondi: Unlike other cats, the jaguarondi has a long and low body with short legs. Measuring about 30 inches, with a 20 inch tail as well, jaguarondi can weigh up to 20 pounds. Genetically, its closest relatives are pumas and jaguars. Preferring lowland forests, the jaguarondi is often seen close to rivers and streams and can catch fish very well with its front paws. It also eats birds and small mammals. The jaguarondi is a diurnal species and a ground dweller, usually not climbing trees; when they do, they don't climb high, just resting in tree branches, but hunting on the ground.

Pumas: Found throughout the Americas, pumas tend to be different colors depending on where they live. Although over 30 subspecies of pumas have been described, today only six are known to exist. This large cat can weigh almost 250 pounds and measure more than 100 inches in length. A natural hunter, like all cats, pumas are big enough to take on even cattle and horses, as well as other small mammals.

Marine Life

West Indies Manatee: Often called the sea cow, the American manatee is a gentle, herbivorous mammal inhabiting the warm waters of the Caribbean Sea. Due to a lack of body fat and low metabolic rate, its presence is restricted to tropical areas. Able to withstand drastic changes in salinity, the manatee, although usually found in shallow coastal areas, also inhabits shallow rivers, estuaries and canals. Capable of swimming long distances up rivers that don't have strong currents, manatees have been found over 100 miles from the sea. Entirely aquatic, the manatee only pokes its nose out of the water to breathe every few minutes. Weighing up to 3,500 pounds and measuring up to 15 feet, this mammal has a large, cylindrical shape, similar to that of a seal, with fore-flippers and no hind legs or limbs, but rather a flat, rounded paddle. It uses its forward flippers to move along the ocean floor and for scratching, touching or even hugging other manatees. With a snout bent downwards for consuming sea

grasses, its upper lip is vertically divided and it can move each side independently while feeding. It uses this flexible upper lip and the forelimbs to put food in its mouth. It feeds on submerged, floating and emergent vegetation, such as rooted sea grasses, emergent vascular plants, algae and mangroves. One factor that makes the manatee vulnerable is a slow reproduction rate, with an interval of three to five years between offspring. Female manatees usually don't reproduce successfully until they are seven to nine years old, with a gestation period of about 13 months. It usually has one calf, which remains with the mother about two years. Manatees have a weak social structure and are either solitary creatures or live in small groups. This is because they have evolved in areas with no natural predators and have not needed to group together for protection. Abundant food sources have also eliminated the need to forage in groups.

Whale Sharks: Whale sharks are the largest fish in the sea, measuring 18 to 35 feet long and weighing up to 13 tons. Despite their massive size, these sharks are not aggressive and pose no threat to humans. An open-sea species, they inhabit warm waters near the equator worldwide. Greenish-gray, dark gray or bronze in color, they have distinguishing white dots and lines on their backs, with a cream-colored underbelly. Unlike other sharks, their mouths are at the front their heads, instead of beneath their snouts. They open their mouths very wide, suctioning in large amounts of water to filter and consume plankton. It is believed that migration patterns follow plankton blooms. They do have about 300 rows of teeth, but these are tiny, measuring no more than an eighth of an inch long, which helps them to consume small fish such as anchovies and sardines. Whale sharks give birth to live young that hatch in eggs inside the mother's body. Solitary creatures, they are seldom seen in groups.

> **What's in a Name?** Whale sharks are sharks, not whales. The whale part was added to describe their size.

Reptiles

So far, nearly 250 reptiles have been counted in Honduras; over 25 are endemic. This number represents nearly half the reptiles found in the neotropics from Mexico to Panama, where there about 530 in total. Species such as the Central American river turtle, which lives in larger rivers and lakes, are endemic to the region from southern Mexico to northern Honduras. **Snakes** are the largest group of reptiles in Honduras, followed by **lizards**, **turtles**, and **crocodiles**.

The most notorious Honduran reptile is the **Ctenosaura Bakeri iguana**, affectionately known as the "Swamper Iguana," found on the island of Utila. A regal example of one of 17 species of spiny-tailed iguanas found throughout the Isthmus, the Swamper is being protected by the Conservation Project Utila Project, which includes the Iguana Breeding and Research Station; be sure to visit Utila to see the Swamper up close, along with other reptiles. See page 242 for details.

> **For the Reptile-Lover:** Gunther Köhler, the founder of the Utila Project, wrote *Reptiles of Central America*, published in 2003.

Birds

Honduras boasts 58 families, with more than 700 species of migratory and native birds. The national bird is the **scarlet macaw**. A few of the species include the resplendent quetzal, kingfisher, motezuma oropendula, toucan, harpy eagle, king vulture, roseate spoonbill, as well as several species of parrots, motmots, and hummingbirds. A complete list can be found at www.birdlist.org/honduras.htm. The only bird species endemic to Honduras is the **Honduran emerald** *(Amazilia luciae)*, found in the dry forest of the Olanchito region.

Throughout this book the birds found in different places will be listed. Lake Yojoa, Tela and La Ceiba are among the most accessible places where you can see the largest variety of birds.

If you are a fervent bird-watcher, get hold of ***Birding Honduras, A Checklist & Guide*** *by Mark Bonta and David L. Anderson, available on Amazon.com.*

Butterflies, Insects & Other Small Creatures

There are about 700 different species of **butterflies** in Honduras. Spending a few days in the rainforest will allow you to see many if you're patient. You can also visit the **Butterfly and Insect Museum**, www.hondurasbutterfly.com, in La Ceiba, which boasts over 10,000 specimens of butterflies, moths and other insects from Honduras and 36 other countries. Honduras is home to 116 species of amphibians, and you're sure to run across them just about anywhere you go. These include 25 types of **salamanders** and 89 species of **frogs**, plus two kinds of **caecilians**, a legless, tailless tropical amphibian, with an earthworm-like appearance. Frogs of various colors are usually found in the park areas, while **geckos** are commonly seen indoors, and it's not unusual to see **lizards** basking in the sun on roadsides.

■ Government

Honduras is governed under the Constitution of 1982. A president, popularly elected for a single four-year term, heads the executive branch. The unicameral legislature has 128 members, also elected for four years. The country is divided into 18 administrative departments. Presidential elections were held on November 27, 2005 and José Manuel "Mel" Zelaya Rosales of the Liberal Party won the November 27, 2005 presidential elections. Zelaya's campaign theme was "citizen power," and he has vowed to increase transparency. Zelaya was inaugurated on January 27, 2006.

■ Economy

This is one of the poorest and least-developed countries in Latin America. Industrial development has been limited and, historically, the economy has been dependent on **agricultural**

exports, such as coffee and bananas that are subject to such natural disasters as Hurricane Mitch and fluctuating world markets. The agricultural sector received a boost in June 2005, when Honduras became the first country in the hemisphere to sign a Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) compact with the USG. Under the compact, the US Millennium Challenge Corporation will invest $215 million over five years to help Honduras improve its road infrastructure, diversify its agriculture, and get its products to market.

In an attempt to reduce dependence on agricultural production, during the last 15 to 20 years the economy has beendiversified, with the development of non-traditional exports such as cultivated shrimp and melons, and the establishment of the maquila industry (primarily, assembly for re-export of textiles and apparel). The **maquila industry**, drawing on an incredibly low-paid work force, is now the second-largest in the world, and also the major generator of export revenues for Honduras. However, the 2005 liberalization of China's export quotas could seriously affect Honduras.

Tourism, which is growing in leaps and bounds, appears to be the most promising factor for future economic growth – if tourist activities are carefully monitored to avoid destruction of delicate ecosystems, which are the primary attraction, and crime rates are contained.

Gruesome gang violence continues and **drug trafficking** and **money laundering** are major industries. Although increased police presence has reduced the official crime rate, providing social stability would achieve better results. The lack of opportunity, unemployment, underemployment, poor education, and corruption, together with the unequal distribution of wealth, keep the country in poverty, which fuels popular discontent and violence.

Honduras has extensive forest, marine, and mineral resources, although widespread slash-and-burn agricultural methods and uncontrolled logging continue to destroy forests.

While inflation has dropped slightly and Honduras continues to maintain stable macroeconomic policies, it has lagged in implementing structural reforms.

Family remittances from Hondurans living abroad (mostly in the United States) rose 19% to $860 million in 2003, and are soon expected to pass the *maquila* sector as the country's largest source of foreign exchange.

The **exchange rate** as of publication was 18.90 Honduran lempira to the dollar, compared to 17.75 a year earlier. The currency has been undergoing a steady and controlled devaluation of roughly 6% per year for the last several years. **Inflation**, as measured by the consumer price index, was 7% in 2004, down from 7.7% the year before and considerably lower than the double-digit inflation rates of the 1990s. International reserves, which had fallen from $1.235 billion at the end of 2002 to $1.16 billion at the end of 2003, rebounded to $1.464 billion by 2005.

Unemployment was officially estimated at 28.5% in 2004, compared to 27.5% in 2003. The economic slowdown in the United States in 2001 and 2002 caused a downturn in the growth of Honduras' maquila sector, but investment and employment revived in 2003. Employment in the sector is almost back to its 2000 peak of 125,000 workers.

One of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere with an extraordinarily unequal distribution of income and massive unemployment, Honduras is banking on expanded trade under the US-Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and on debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative, which was granted in late 2005.

■ People/Culture

Honduras is home to 6.8 million people. The two largest cities are Tegucigalpa, with almost a million people, and San Pedro Sula, with nearly 800,000. With one of the highest population growth rates in the Western Hemisphere, at 3% a year. Half of the people are under 15. Most people, especially in smaller cities and towns, are amiable and will greet you upon entering or leaving any public place with a "buenas," which is short for "Buenos días or buenas tardes" (good morning or good afternoon); if you're eating they might say "buen provecho," which translates as "enjoy your meal."

Language: The official language is **Spanish** and everyone speaks it, including indigenous people who also speak their native language. In the larger cities, many also speak English. Most of those offering tourism services speak some English. Residents of the Bay Islands speak both Spanish and Creole English, which makes visiting the islands easy for Americans from both North and South America.

Religion: The predominant religion is **Roman Catholicism**, although the number of **Protestant** sects is on the rise. Each year, every municipality holds a week-long celebration in honor of their patron saint. Traditional dances and music, along with religious ceremonies and rites, form part of the celebration. Indigenous instruments such as conch-shell horns, drums, and flutes, are often used.

Indigenous Peoples

> **Did You Know?** Although the 370 million indigenous peoples in 70 countries make up only 4% of the world's population, they represent 95% of the planet's cultural diversity? The earth's 5,000-plus indigenous groups are scattered from the rainforests of the Amazon to the deserts of India and from the Arctic polar ice to the vast outback of Australia. (See www.nativeplanet.org for more.)

Even before globalization, Honduras boasted a rich cultural diversity. Most Hondurans are of *ladino* or *mestizo* origin, a European and indigenous mix, but there are also several Amerindian tribes as well as the Afro-American **Garífuna**. Due to exploitation by Spanish Colonialists, most of the native population died out during the Conquista and today only 1% of the population is made up of indigenous people. But you'll still have plenty of opportunity to interact with the native people of Honduras, as they are scattered all over the country. The **Chorti Maya**, direct descendents of the lost Maya civilization, reside in Western Honduras, as do the **Lenca**, the largest indigenous group. In an isolated north coast region, the **Tolupan** live on the Montaña de la Flor (Flower Mountain) in the Department of Yoro. The **Tawahka**,

Pech, and **Miskitos** reside mostly along or near the coastal plains in the departments of Gracias a Dios, Colón, and Olancho. Along the Honduran Caribbean, live the **Garífuna**, the AfroHonduran descendants of African slaves and West Indies Amerindians.

The Lenca

The largest indigenous group in Honduras. They inhabit western and southwestern Honduras and number around 80,000. Although some Lenca organizations do exist, this group is dispersed over a wide area and lost its native language around the turn of the last century due to educational programs at the time. They have preserved their culture though, and during the yearly patron saint's festival held in January you can observe the **Guancasco**, a traditional dance representing peace between the people of different villages. As with many American tribes, their diet is based on corn and beans. They produce beautiful pottery, which can be found for sale throughout Honduras.

The Garífuna

Garífuna villages line the north coast, and visiting or staying in one or more of them is a must-do cultural experience. The Garífuna are the Afro-American descendants of Amerindians from St. Vincent, a Caribbean island, and shipwrecked African slaves. The Americans were descendants of the Kalipuna tribe of South America and native Arawaks of St. Vincent. The Kalipuna had previously invaded the islands and killed off the Arawak men, so they could take the Arawak women as wives. In 1635, Africans from Nigeria escaped from two shipwrecked Spanish slave ships near St. Vincent. The slaves intermingled with the Arawak-Kalipuna natives and their descendants became known as Black Caribs or Garífuna. The Garífuna fought against both French and English Colonialism, but in 1796, the British defeated a serious rebellion on St. Vincent and exiled the Garinagu (plural) to the Bay Islands of Honduras. From there, they migrated to the coasts of Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Belize. The largest Garífuna population resides in Honduras, although they have villages all along the Caribbean coast from Mexico south. The rich Garífuna culture incorporated Native American methods

of cultivation (mainly yucca), hunting, and fishing with African elements of music, dance, and religion.

> *The word Garífuna means "cassava eating people." Cassava is a thin, crusty bread of ground manioc or yucca.*

The Garífuna have managed to conserve their culture and live in close-knit communities. They harvest their sustenance from the sea in dugout canoes carved from precious hardwoods and use handmade nets. They speak their own language, but most also speak Spanish and/or English, maintain their religious beliefs, and perform their original music and dance. The pulsating rhythm of the "punta" is a traditional Garífuna dance. Traditional Garífuna homes had bamboo walls and thatched roofs. Modern times, however, have seen these replaced by cement.

Traditional Garífuna food is some of the best in Honduras. Coconut is a staple of the Garífuna diet. The fruit is used to produce coconut oil, coconut bread, and coconut sweets. Fried fish, plantains, and a rice and beans mixture, are prepared in coconut oil; conch and other soups contain shredded coconut. My favorite, coconut bread, which comes in thick square buns, is a delight fresh out of the oven.

The Pech

Formally known as Payas, the Pech number about 2,000 people, who live in communities in the Moskitia, Olancho and in Silín near Trujillo. Many work as tour guides in the Moskitia and Olancho, but most are subsistence farmers and fishermen.

Today, the Pech are one of the smallest indigenous groups in Honduras. Their numbers were greatly reduced with colonization when they were hunted down by Miskitos to be sold into slavery, which caused them to adopt a nomadic lifestyle based on fish and meat rather than on agricultural products. Intermarriage has also reduced their numbers, a reason Pech elders encourage women to marry at a very young age. Despite continuous threats to their culture, their independent nature has allowed this small group to retain many

aspects of their culture and language. Some anthropologists believe the Pech language is another derivative of the Chibca language of South Americas. Others disagree, declaring that the origin of the Pech language is unknown.

The Miskitos

The Miskitos inhabit an area known as La Moskitia, an isolated region in northeastern Honduras with lowland coastal areas, savannas and rainforests. Together with the Nicaraguan Moskitia, this enormous area of more than 30,000 square miles is known as the Central American Amazon. Numbering nearly 60,000, the Miskito live in the towns of Puerto Lempira, Brus Laguna, Ahuas/Wampusirpe and in villages in the Río Plátano Biosphere area.

The Chorti Maya

The Chortí Maya, descendants of the Maya, live in the area around Copán and near the Guatemalan border. Like the major part of the Guatemalan population, physical similarities to their ancestors are evident at a glance; beautiful polished brown skin, equine noses, and stark, high cheekbones make for a handsome race. The Honduran Chortí no longer wears traditional Maya clothing and only a few older members of the tribe still speak the language. But they do maintain much of their cultural heritage. The Chortí earn a living by producing handicrafts, which include pottery, woven mats, and baskets. Many also work as tour guides. Their primary activity is agriculture, mainly corn, and they venerate nature through religious rites honoring the Earth Goddess, the Wind Gods, and blessing the seeds. Autochthonous musical instruments such as the "Toponagua," "El Cortin," "El Pito," "El Chinchin," "La Sonaja" y "El Cuerno" are used during these rituals. The most important dance is the "Dance of the Giants." Like their ancestors, the Chortí grow and use tobacco for mysterious reasons, such as predicting the future, driving out evil spirits, and praying for rain for their crops.

The Chortís ancestral diet is based on corn and beans, which are prepared in different ways to produce food and drinks. Exanples are corn tortillas, corn tamales, corn and bean tamales, my favorite, sweet atole, a porridge or gruel of maize

meal and water, chicha, a fermented corn beverage, chilate, a ceremonial corn drink with cocoa.

The Tawahka

A small group of Tawahka, approximately 2,000, inhabits the Tawahka Asangni Biosphere Reserve in the southern region of the Moskitia. They too speak their own tribal language and live as subsistence farmers, hunters, and fishermen. According to Tawahka legend, the Tawahka fathers Mai-Sahana and Yapti-Misri were born out of big stone in the Patuca River and formed the Miskitos and Tawahkas.

Both the Miskito and Tawahka are keen on conserving their cultures and have managed to integrate bilingual programs (Spanish/Miskito or Tawahka) into the local educational systems. As with all the native tribes in Honduras, these groups are plagued by land tenancy issues, government neglect, and economic isolation. But the Tawahka, perhaps due to their reduced numbers, have been more successful in establishing their rights to ancestral lands through a congressional decree establishing the Tawahka Biosphere Reserve, for which they have a communal title.

The Xicaque

The Xicaque or Tolupanes number approximately 20,000 people and live in 26 villages in the Departments of Yoro and in two villages in the Department of Francisco Morazan on the Montaña de la Flor. Only the tribes found on the Montaña de Flor still conserve their native language Tol. Social organization is based on family structure and the Tribal Council. Some linguists believe the Xicaque are of North American extraction because their language is related to Hokan-Sioux, while others disagree. Originally residing beside large bodies of water such as rivers, lakes and the ocean, Colonial persecution forced them to adopt a more nomadic way of life until they finally settled in remote mountain regions.

The Xicaque produce agricultural products such as corn, beans, oranges, mangos, avocados, tobacco, and honey. To a lesser degree they depend on hunting as a food source and they still use traditional bows and arrow to hunt. The women also produce woven baskets.

■ Holidays

March-April . . . . . Easter Week
May 1 . . . . . Labor Day
September 15. . . . . Independence Day
October 3. . . . . Francisco Morazán Day
October 12 . . . . . Columbus Day
October 21 . . . . . Armed Forces Day

■ Festivals

January . . . . . Guancasco Festival (Saint Sebastian), Gracias; Santa Lucía Festival
February Guancasco Festival (Virgen de Candelaria), Intibuca
First week of February . . . . . Fiesta Virgin de Suyapa, Suyapa, TGU suburb
March . . . . . Area Fair (fair), Copán Ruinas; Good Friday Procession, La Esperanza
April 14 . . . . . Pan American Day, various places
Third week in May . . . . . La Ceiba Carnival
Entire month of June . . . . . Fair, San Pedro Sula
June . . . . . Fiesta San Juan Bautista, Trujillo; Fiesta de San Antonio, all week, Tela
July . . . . . Festival, Honoring Lempira, Gracias
Late August . . . . . Fiesta Santa Rosa de Lima SRC
August . . . . . Caribe Fest, Roatán; Puerto Cortés Fair
Last Saturday of August . . . . . Danli, El Paraiso, Corn Festival
September . . . . . San Pedro Sula, Folkloric Festival
October . . . . . Valle de Angeles Festival, near Tegucigalpa
December . . . . . Copán Ruinas Area Fair; Central American Artisan Craft Fair, Tegucigalpa

■ Golden Rules of Eco-Tourism

Over the last few years, in an effort to strengthen the economy and simultaneously conserve natural resources, the Honduran government began an international tourism campaign. The country's boundless tropical environment is a key attraction. With a population of a mere seven million, much of your travel will be into remote agricultural or forest areas inhabited by culturally diverse peoples. For the independent traveler, keeping the following golden rules of eco-tourism in mind will help make your visit more enjoyable.

1. Learn about your destination before you get there. Read guidebooks, travel articles, histories, and/or novels by local authors and pay particular attention to customs such as

greetings, appropriate dress and eating behaviors. Being sensitive to these customs will increase local acceptance of you as a tourist and enrich your trip.

2. Follow established guidelines. Ask your eco-tour operator, guide and/or the local authorities what their guidelines are for limiting tourism's impact on the environment and local culture. Staying on trails, packing up your trash, and remaining set distances away from wildlife are a few ways to minimize your impact in sensitive areas.

3. Support local businesses during your eco-travels to ensure maximum community and conservation benefit from your tourist dollars.

■ Travel Information

Money Matters

The local currency is the Honduran lempira (Lps.), valued at about 5¢ US. Dollars are easily exchanged for lempiras in banks, major hotels, airports and exchange houses. Most Honduran banks are open on weekdays from 9 am to 4 pm, with most drive-throughs staying opening as late as 7 pm. Currency exchange houses are open longer and offer quicker services (as well as a better exchange rate) than banks.

The larger cities have ATMs in most of the banks and in the major shopping malls, which accept Visa and Visa Debit cards. Some of these also accept Mastercard and American Express. The smaller towns sometimes have a branch of Banco Atlántida, which can give you a money advance from your Visa card. Traveler's checks can be cashed at any bank and the larger hotels.

Sales Tax

A 12% Value Added Tax ("ISV") is added to all retail items except medicines. Some luxury goods have a higher tax.

Telephone Services

The country code for Honduras is 504. To call Honduras from the United States, dial 011-504 followed by the seven-digit local number. To call

from Europe or most other countries, dial 00-504, followed by the seven-digit number. In Honduras itself, dial only the seven-digit local number.

Although cellular phones have increased coverage to remote places, telephone service in Honduras is extremely limited, as most people don't have phones. Telephone calls to the US presently cost Lps. 25 ($1.25) per minute. Fortunately, all of the larger cities and many of the smaller towns have Internet cafés and many offer international telephone service for about Lps. 2 (10¢) per minute to the US or slightly more to other countries outside Central America. Calls to other Central American countries are expensive. In the larger cities some of the Internet cafés also offer international fax service, which costs about Lps. 20 ($1) per page.

Emergency Phone Numbers

National Long Distance 191
Information 192
Red Cross 195
Time 196
International Long Distance 197
Fire Department 198
Police 199

Mail

All official municipalities in Honduras have a post office and usually an Express Mail Service in the same locale or right next door. Most post offices are near the Central Plaza or the Municipal Building. Mailing valuables through the Honduran post office is not recommended. You can ask your hotel about Fedex and DHL, which offer services from larger cities. Expreco is the most widely used Honduran next-day courier service for packages within the country.

Drinking Water

Most establishments use purified bottled water for cooking and beverages. But, if you have any doubts, the best option is to ask for a canned or bottled drink in its original container without any ice; especially in smaller towns and villages.

Food

Traditional Honduran platters include: seafood, tortillas, beans, enchiladas, corn tamales, nacatamales, mondongo, tapado, as well as tropical fruits such as mangos, payapas, pineapples, avocados, bananas and many other exotic species you might taste for the first time. Fresh fruits and vegetables tend to look different from US produce, but the taste is the same. You should, however, make sure that all your food is well cooked, especially in the smaller towns and roadside stands. Most of these smaller locations do not have refrigeration.

In the larger towns and cities you can find almost any kind of international platter you might desire as well as lots of fast food restaurants including McDonalds, Burger King, Pizza Hut, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Popeye's, Dunkin Donuts, Wendy's or Church's Chicken.

Shopping

The larger chain stores, the more expensive retail stores, and most supermarkets in the larger cities normally accept credit cards for the amount of purchase only. The smaller stores and those in villages usually do not. The credit card companies charge merchants a 6½% fee on every credit card purchase. This is in addition to the 12% VAT (Value Added Tax or sales tax) on most items. There is also a 4% hotel and restaurant tax. In most stores, the price shown already includes these fees and taxes.

Hospitals, Clinics & Pharmacies

Foreign hospital insurance is not accepted in Honduras. Be prepared to either pay in cash or, sometimes in the larger cities, with a credit card. Be sure to obtain a complete statement of the services and supplies rendered along with the medications so you can make a claim against your insurance when you return home. Except for narcotics, all other types of medicine can be bought from a pharmacy without a prescription. You can obtain a prescription from any doctor or dentist in this country, if needed,

which will allow you to get the local equivalent of your normal or needed medicine. Bring with you a sufficient supply of the medicines you normally take, along with spare eyeglasses and/or a prescription for glasses.

Pharmacies rotate staying open until 10 pm. The pharmacy open on any given day until 10 pm is called the "Farmacia de Turno." Most pharmacies post paper signs daily on the door, window or outside wall that give the name and address of the "Farmacia de Turno." You can also call ☎ 192 for the same information in Spanish.

Handicap Accessibility

With a few noted exceptions, there are very few locations or services, such as buses, street crossings or parks, in the country that make allowances for wheelchairs and the handicapped.

When to Visit

The best time to visit Honduras is from February to June, when there is less likelihood of heavy rainfall.

The climate varies more depending on the altitude than on the season. Temperatures on coastal flatlands are usually hot and humid, while in the central highlands it is usually warm in the daytime and cooler at night. There are two main seasons, the rainy season or "winter" (*invierno*), from May to November; and the dry season or summer (*verano*) from December to April. On the north coast, heavy rains tend to last through January, sometimes for days at a time. And on the north coast and the Moskitia region, you can expect rain any day of the year.

THINGS TO BRING ON THE PLANE

Passport, prescription medications, toiletries, camera/film, personal items, traveler's checks and a change of clothing. Other items to bring: sunscreen, sunglasses, hat, insect repellent, beach towel, binoculars and batteries.

Clothing

Your attire will depend on where you travel in Honduras. The central highlands tend to be cooler and jeans or slacks are usually comfortable to wear. In December and January, a light sweater or jacket is sometimes necessary. Coastal wetlands tend to be hot and humid so lighter clothing is more common. Conservative clothing is better for larger cities and small towns farther inland. In coastal cities, casual attire is more accepted and appropriate.

Safety

The crime rate in the big cities is high. While people are not being mugged on every corner, you should be alert at all times. Try to walk around in groups when possible. Personally, I'm suspicious of scruffy boys or young men wearing sneakers and not carrying a small back pack (students use them); also of groups of youngsters not dressed for work or school walking toward me or too close behind. Although not as common as before, street children with their shirts on their nose are usually sniffing glue. If you see them doing that, it's better to cross the street, as drugged people can get aggressive. In the cities, it's also best to drive around with your windows rolled up – especially on corners and at stop signs where there is a lot of traffic. If you are held up or mugged, the most important thing to remember is **do not resist**. There is nothing you can't recover other than your life.

Rural areas tend to be much safer and men can usually walk just about anywhere they want along rural roads. It's usually safe for women to walk around any town, but hiking alone in the countryside is not recommended. The exception is national park areas where the entrance is generally somewhat controlled. That's not to say the bad guys can't get into parks and mug people. It's just not the norm and is why it's always a good idea to check in with park authorities and tell them where you're going.

The Ministry of Tourism offers the following suggestions for personal safety:

- Plan a clear travel route.
- Do not leave your luggage unattended or hand it over to strangers.
- Personal documentation should be in order and up to date.
- Do not leave valuable articles in sight.
- Carry a country map at all times and, if you get lost, head for a public place such as a gas station, restaurant, police post (along the highway or main road in every town) in your search for assistance.
- Inform yourself concerning local, airport, and tourist taxes you must pay.
- Stay within well lighted and safe areas.

Getting Here

Passports & Visas

A valid passport is the only requirement for entry to Honduras for the citizens of all the Central American countries, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Monaco, Norway, New Zealand, Paraguay, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Venezuela, United Kingdom, United States, and Uruguay. An exit fee of US$27 is charged at airport departure points.

Tourist visas are normal granted for a duration of one month, but can be extended on a month-to-month basis for a fee of $20 per month at the local Immigration Office in most major towns. A maximum stay of three months is permitted, after which one must depart the country for a minimum of three days. Then you can return and start the process over again. Don't lose the yellow form they staple into your passport; you'll need it to exit the country or to extend your stay.

For visa information concerning other countries, visit the website of the Honduran Embassy in Washington, DC at www.hondurasemb.org/visas, call the Embassy, ☎ 504-(202) 737-2972/78 or e-mail consul.hondurasdcusa@verizon.net.

By Air

From the United States

From most international airports in the US there are direct or connecting flights to San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa with **Continental** and **American Airlines** on a daily basis.

TACA also has connecting flights to Roatán from Miami, Houston, New Orleans, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Dallas/Fort Worth, Washington, DC, New York, Toronto, and Montreal. These flights typically have one stop in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, or San Salvador, El Salvador.

American Airlines and Continental Airlines offer daily flights to both San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa, from where you can continue your journey.

TACA offers one and Continental Airlines offers two non-stop flights from Houston to Roatán every Saturday (2½ hours).

Continental	☎ 1-800-231-0856 or www.continental.com	
Flight #1894	Houston-Roatán	Depart 9:30 am; arrive 11:10 am
Flight #1895	Roatán-Houston	Depart 12:35 pm; arrive 4:26 pm
Flight #1864	Houston-Roatán	Depart 12:50pm; arrive 2:34 am
Flight #1865	Roatán-Houston	Depart 3:20 pm; arrive 7:15 pm
TACA	☎ 1-800-535-8780 or www.taca.com	
Flight #431	Houston-Roatán	Depart 3:50; arrive 6:20 pm
Flight #430	Roatán-Houston	Depart 10:30 am; arrive 2:15 pm

From Other Central American Countries

TACA offers daily flights to San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa from Mexico City, Guatemala City, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama City, and San Jose. This airline also has direct flights on Saturday from El Salvador to Roatán at 9:50 am.

Atlantic Airlines also flies to Nicaragua, Belize, Guatemala and Costa Rica at very reasonable rates. They are a local carrier based in La Ceiba. Call their office at ☎ 445-0055. 445-1179 in La Ceiba, 557-7270 in San Pedro Sula, or check with any travel agency for schedules.

Copa Airlines out of Panama flies to and from Tegucigalpa from major Central American cities, some South American cities, as well as the Caribbean.

From Europe

If you are arriving from Europe, your best option is a connecting flight from Miami, Houston, or New Orleans to either Roatán or San Pedro Sula.

International Airlines	
American Airlines, www.aa.com	
Tegucigalpa	☎ 232-1484, 232-1750, airport, 233-6848
San Pedro Sula	☎ 553-3364, airport, 668-3245
Toll-free in Honduras	☎ 800-220-1414
Toll-free in the US	☎ 1-800-633-3711
Reservations Center	☎ 220-7585 (when calling from Honduras)
Continental Airlines, www.continental.com	
Tegucigalpa	☎ 220-0999, airport, 233-7676
San Pedro Sula	☎ 557-4141 to 43, airport, 668-3192
Toll-free in the US	☎ 1-800-231-0856
Aerohonduras, www.aerohonduras.com	
Tegucigalpa	☎ 235-3737, 234-0676
San Pedro Sula	☎ 550-6944, airport, 668-8998
Copa Airlines, www.copaair.com	
Tegucigalpa	☎ 233-COPA/233-2672, airport, 291-0099
Iberia, www.iberia.com	
Tegucigalpa	☎ 239-4566
Air France, Alitalia & AeroMexico	
Tegucigalpa	☎ 239-0857, 237-0216
Japan Airlines	
Tegucigalpa	☎ 234-7072

On Land

You can enter Honduras through one of the following border crossing:

From Guatemala

Aduana El Florido, Department of Copán

Aduana Agua Caliente, Department of Ocotepeque

Aduana Corinto, Department of Cortés

From El Salvador

Aduana El Poy, Department of Ocotepeque

Aduana El Amatillo, Deparment of Valle

From Nicaragua

Aduana Las Manos, Department of El Paraíso

Aduana Guasaule, Department of Choluteca

Aduana La Fraternidad, Department of Choluteca

By Bus

● International Bus Services

The following bus companies offer deluxe bus service from Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula to other major Central American cities.

Tica Bus, www.ticabus.com, offers international bus service between Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula and Choluteca to Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama. Most of the buses departing San Pedro Sula go through Tegucigalpa. Prices one-way from Tegucigalpa are as follows: Nicaragua ($20), El Salvador ($45), Guatemala ($53), Tapachula, Mexico ($68), Costa Rica ($31) and Panamá ($87). Phone numbers in Tegucigalpa, ☎ 220-0579, 220-0590; in San Pedro Sula ☎ 556-5149; and Choluteca, ☎ 882-5395.

King Quality, Tegucigalpa, ☎ 225-5415, offers daily services to El Salvador and Guatemala.

Pullmantur is the newest service and runs out of the Marriot Hotel in Tegucigalpa, ☎ 232-0197, 232-0194, 232-0216, offering daily service to El Salvador and Guatemala.

By Car

Travelers entering Honduras by car can expect to pay the following fees:

1. Form 9A-1, $7
2. Vehicle inspection varies according to the vehicle – sedan $1, pick-up, van, microbus, $1.50 and buses $4
3. Aduanet (customs office), $10
4. Public roads, $20

Drivers of vehicles with license plates from one of the CA-4 countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras) will be provided the proper forms for border crossing with no fees.

Vehicles with Costa Rica plates must pay: Form 9A-1 $7, Public Roads $20 and Aduanet $10.

Getting Around

Unless you take the weekly chartered plane from Italy or one of the weekly Saturday flights from Houston or El Salvador that fly directly to the island of Roatán, you'll land either in Tegucigalpa or San Pedro Sula.

Tourist information is available inside both terminals, after you pass customs and baggage claim. Taxis are available outside both airports, car rental offices are on the premises of both airports, and most major hotels and some smaller ones will arrange for your pick-up if arranged in advance. Most taxi fares in both cities to any point shouldn't be more than $10 per person from the airport. In Tegucigalpa, a major highway runs right outside the terminals.

> **Tip:** If you walk out the gates of the Tegucigalpa airport, you can easily get a non-airport taxi, which will cost at least 25% less.

Airlines

Local carriers provide service between Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba, and Roatán to smaller airports in Trujillo, Guanaja, Utila, and Puerto Lempira, Brus Laguna and Palacios in the Moskitia. At this time, no regular flights are being offered to Trujillo, but if you are interested in flying there, you might inquire with Sosa Airlines or Atlantic Air-

lines in La Ceiba. Both offer flights to the Moskitia region and might stop in Trujillo on the way.

A new airport is slated to open in 2006 in the Copán region in Río Amarillo, which is about 10 miles from the ruins. Currently **La Estanzuela Tours**, ☎ 504-651-4515, laestanzuela_tours@yahoo.es, manages a private airstrip in the Copán region and offers charter flights, as well as the first commercial service to Copán Ruinas from the island of Roatán every Thursday. A round-trip tickets costs $180, one-way costs $90; flights depart Roatán at 8 am, and return from Copán the same day at 3 pm.

Isleña Airlines is based in La Ceiba, and offers service between Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba, and the Bay Islands. They are currently not flying to the Moskitia region.

Isleña Airlines, www.flyislena.com, info@flyislena.com	
La Ceiba, ☎ 443-0179, airport, 441-2534, 441-2519	San Pedro Sula, ☎ 552-8322, airport, 668-3333
Tegucigalpa, ☎ 237-3370, airport, 233-3568	Roatán, ☎ 445-1397, airport, 445-1088
Guanaja, airport, ☎ 453-4208	Trujillo, airport, ☎ 434-4966

Sosa Airlines is a very reliable carrier offering daily flights between La Ceiba and the Bay Islands, and between La Ceiba and Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, as well as to Puerto Lempira and other areas in the Moskitia. Call to inquire about schedules and availability.

Aerolíneas Sosa, aerososa@psinet.hn	
La Ceiba, ☎ 443-2519, 443-1399, airport, 440-0692, 441-2513	San Pedro Sula, ☎ 550-6545, airport, 668-3223
Tegucigalpa, ☎ 235-5107, 229-0757, airport, 234-0137, 233-7351	Roatán, airport, ☎ 445-1658, 445-1154
Guanaja, airport, ☎ 453-4359	Utilla, airport, ☎ 425-3161
Puerto Lempira, airport, ☎ 898-7467, 898-7432	Palacios, airport, ☎ 978-8397
Brus Laguna, airport, ☎ 898-7958, 898-7936	

Atlantic Airlines offers many internal routes. These run from La Ceiba to the Bay Islands, between La Ceiba and San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa. They also offer daily flights to Puerto Lempira and Brus Lagoon in the Moskitia, as well as between San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa. Prices are modest.

Atlantic Airlines, www.atlanticairlines.com.ni, atlantic@caribe.hn	
La Ceiba, ☎ 445-0055, 445-1179, airport, 440-2343, 440-1220	San Pedro Sula, ☎ 557-7270, airport, 668-1309, 688-8010
Tegucigalpa, ☎ 234-9701, 234-9702	Roatán, airport, ☎ 445-1179

Renting a Car & Driving

There are several car rental agencies in all the major airport terminals and larger cities and towns. Vehicle rental costs include the cost per day, fuel used, and insurance.

When you rent a car, make sure your credit card covers insurance for the vehicle. Most four-wheel-drive vehicles are not covered. So be prepared to pay extra for insurance and get full coverage in case you are in an accident. Foreign insurance is not valid here and most residents do not carry any insurance since it is not required. Fender benders are common and drivers don't bother calling the police or even paying for the damages. Most drivers do not know or follow the traffic laws. So be careful if you decide to rent a car or are just trying to cross the road. Taxis are in poor shape with bald tires, no lights in front and/or rear, doors that either don't close securely or can't be opened from inside or outside. Animals are normally found on the rural roads. A broken-down vehicle can stop anywhere, especially where you least expect it, such as a blind curve.

If you are in an accident, don't leave the scene until the police, "policia de tránsito," arrive and make up a report or "parte de tránsito." This report is required for the subsequent court appointment you will be given to settle the matter. If it's not settled at this audience, either party can sue for damages

Car Rental Agencies

You can rent a 4x4 vehicle for between $70 and $100 a day or a smaller car for $40-$60 a day. The price includes insurance but not the 12% sales tax. Be aware that the price of gasoline in Honduras is very high. A gallon of premium gasoline currently costs $3.40.

Hertz	
Tegucigalpa, ☎ 238-3772	Tegucigalpa airport, ☎ 234-3784
San Pedro Sula airport, ☎ 668-3156	
Molinari Rent-a-Car	
Tegucigalpa, ☎ 237-5335	Tegucigalpa airport, ☎ 233-1307
San Pedro Sula, ☎ 553-2639	La Ceiba, ☎ 443-0055
Toyota Rent-a-Car, www.hondurasrentacar.com, trac@flores.hn	
La Ceiba, ☎ 441-1102	Tegucigalpa, ☎ 238-3723
Tegucigalpa airport, ☎ 234-3183	San Pedro Sula, ☎ 557-2666
San Pedro Sula airport, ☎ 668-2427	
Econo Rent-a-Car	
Tegucigalpa, ☎ 239-5973	San Pedro Sula, ☎ 668-1884
Avis, www.avis.com, avishonduras@unete.com	
Tegucigalpa, ☎ 232-0088	Tegucigalpa airport, ☎ 239-5712
San Pedro Sula, ☎ 553-0888, 552-2872	San Pedro Sula airport, ☎ 668-3164
La Ceiba, ☎ 441-2802	Puerto Cortés, ☎ 553-0888
Budget Car & Truck Rental, www.budget.com	
Tegucigalpa, ☎ 235-9531	Tegucigalpa airport, ☎ 233-6927
San Pedro Sula, ☎ 552-2295	La Ceiba, ☎ 441-1105

By Taxi

There is an overabundance of taxis available in the larger cities and towns. There are usually two types of cabs: **direct hire** and **route taxis**. Direct hires can be flagged down anywhere. You should always negotiate and agree upon a price before getting in the vehicle. Try to get one that appears to be in better condition. Route or *colectivo* taxis follow specific routes around any given city or town, and have stations, or *puntos* where they park, usually on a corner near the center of town. They are easy to spot; you'll notice a line of taxis parked with someone usually yelling out their destination. You have to wait until they fill up with passengers, but they are considerably less expensive, costing from 20¢ to 50¢.

Bus Transportation

Urban Bus Services

Urban bus transportation is easily available in the larger cities, but figuring out the routes can be difficult, and pickpockets tend to use this mode of transportation. Unless you're planning on staying for a considerable amount of time and need to budget, I recommend you walk, drive, or take a taxi to your destination.

Long-Distance Services

Bus transportation in Honduras can vary greatly.

First class or luxury (*lujo*) lines with reclining seats, air-conditioning, blankets, attendants, videos, restrooms, and meals.

Express or direct routes offer fairly decent buses, some with videos, a/c, and a restroom. At the bare minimum, they provide buses with individual seats. They are offered on most well-established routes as an alternative to the regular or normal service. The express/direct service usually costs more than the regular service because buses don't stop in every village, hamlet, and highway junction to pick people up on the way. Thus, the trip is shorter and they usually don't fill the bus over capacity. They may stop for breakfast or lunch on longer routes and at predetermined points along the way. Cheaper express services and longer routes may allow people in the aisle for short stretches in remote areas where the

police won't spot them. But most of the time the people who are willing to travel standing up are not going very far and will get off quickly.

Regular routes are the budget option and rarely cost more than $5. These are usually old yellow school buses with bench seats that are bought used in the US and then run much longer than any vehicle was intended to be used. They are often referred to as "chicken buses." These buses stop continuously. Although it is illegal for anyone to be standing on interurban buses, they are often filled to the brim. On busy routes, three people share each seat and the aisle is packed from the back door to the front exit.

> **Tip:** Although many of these routes allow (expect) you to pay for your ticket once you've boarded the bus and are seated or standing, it's a better idea to try and buy your ticket at the bus terminal to avoid having to dig for your money on a full bus. But this is not always possible, as not all the companies provide actual tickets. The person who charges the fee somehow knows or remembers who has paid.

One advantage of the chicken buses is that they go everywhere at least once a day! This allows you to change your schedule whenever you like on the busier roads or lose yourself in the backwoods at your leisure.

> **Tip:** San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba, Santa Rosa de Copán, Tegucigalpa, Juticalpa, Danlí, and Choluteca are the major transportation hubs for their surrounding regions.

Hedman Alas, www.hedmanalas.com, which is headquartered in San Pedro Sula, offers the most express routes between major cities. These include Tegucigalpa, San Pedro Sula, La Ceiba, and Copán Ruinas, as well as Antigua, Guatemala and San Salvador, El Salvador. All their national bus routes go through San Pedro Sula. In other words, you can't go straight from La Ceiba to Tegucigalpa with this company.

You will first go to San Pedro Sula and probably change buses. This company has been around a long time, and provides timely, safe, and moderately priced service.

Note that bus schedules are subject to frequent changes. Therefore, it is imperative that you double-check your itinerary. This is especially important when you travel to small or remote destinations. You can either call the bus terminal or go to the central bus terminal and decide which bus you want to take. San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa and Comayagua do not have central bus terminals; but the various bus companys' individual terminals do tend to be in the same general area, with the exception of first-class terminals.

The Northeast Corridor

A trip along the north coast of Honduras offers spectacular scenery through a coastal lowland system of rainforests, mangroves, and lagoons, which merge with rolling hills and mountains as high as 8,000 feet (2,436 m).

In this Chapter

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- La Ceiba 86
- Trujillo 117

The CA-13 highway runs between the ocean and a mountain range from the city of Tela to La Ceiba and continues through fertile valleys on to Trujillo. Along the way, there are many opportunities to visit wildlife refuges, lounge on white sand beaches, and trek through mountain and lowland rainforests. You can also visit Colonial forts, museums, and even a famed pirate's grave.

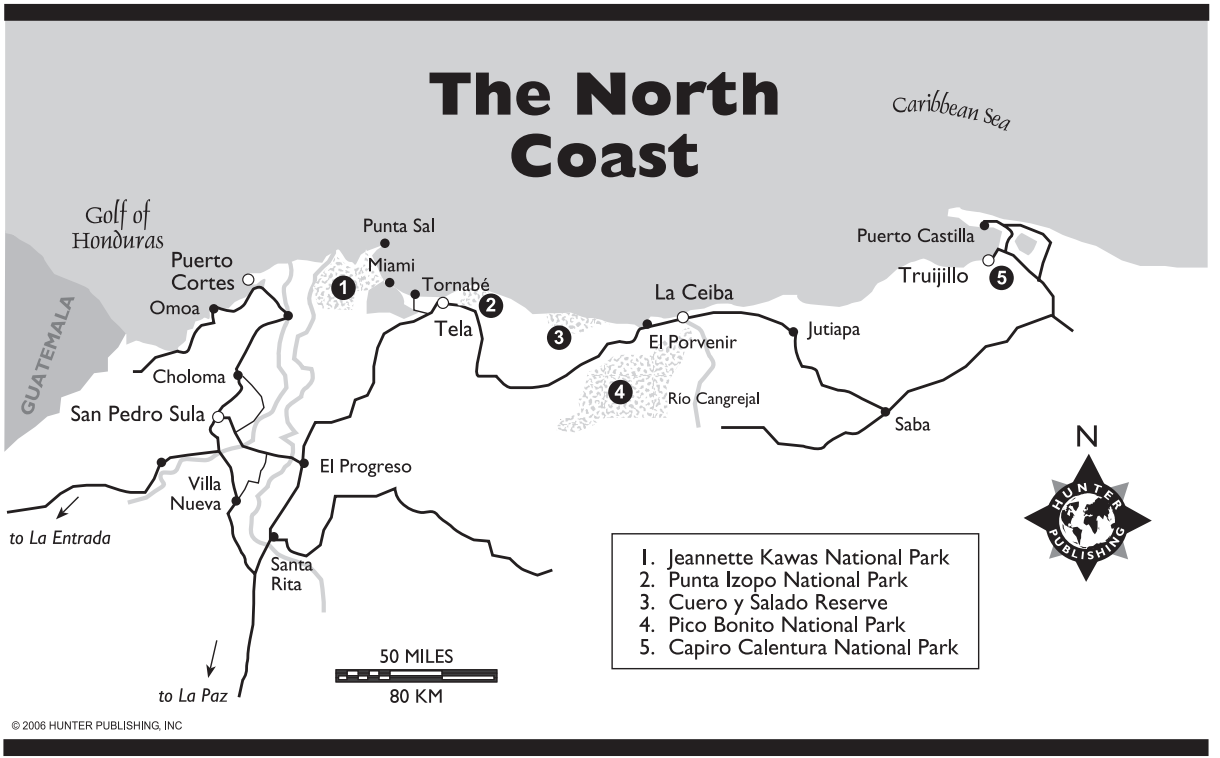
You should spend at least a week in this area to cover all three towns. Two weeks would be more appropriate if you're an avid nature lover, and want to explore the different park areas with their diverse ecosystems.

■ Tela

A world-famous botanical garden and four national parks grace the Tela Bay area. These are inhabited by such wildlife as dolphins, manatees, howler and white-faced capuchin monkeys, crocodiles, sea turtles, iguanas and nearly 400 species of birds. You can take a boat tour through mangrove forests and coastal lagoons, snorkel on coral reefs or just relax on the beach. A visit to one of the outlying Garífuna villages for the day, where you can enjoy a delicious seafood platter prepared in the same way for generations, is a must.

Getting around Tela is easy, and a car is not necessary. You can travel around the town and several nearby villages on foot, or by taxi or bus. Boat rides are readily available on the beach and through tour operators. You can stay in town or lodge in one of the small hotels in the Garífuna communities.

The Tela River divides this small city into **Tela Viejo** (Old Tela) and **Tela Nuevo** (New Tela), so dubbed when the


The North Coast
Caribbean Sea
Golf of Honduras
GUATEMALA
Punta Sal
Miami
Puerto Cortes
Omoa
Tornabé
Tela
La Ceiba
El Porvenir
Jutiapa
Puerto Castilla
Truijillo
Choloma
San Pedro Sula
Rio Cangrejal
Saba
El Progreso
Villa Nueva
to La Entrada
Santa Rita
to La Paz
50 MILES
80 KM
N
1. Jeannette Kawas National Park
2. Punta Izopo National Park
3. Cuero y Salado Reserve
4. Pico Bonito National Park
5. Capiro Calentura National Park
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banana company installed their headquarters west of the river. Older, rambling structures of wood and adobe are a common sight in Tela Viejo, which has a charming beach boardwalk lined with hotels and restaurants. Expatriates, who add a touch of international culture and cuisine to the tropical environs, own many of these businesses.

Swimming in the ocean in or near town is not a good idea; the water is noticeably dirty. Although some businesses keep the beach clean in front of their establishments, I recommend traveling a couple of miles either way for swimming.

History

Tela, originally called Triunfo de la Cruz, was the first Spanish settlement in Honduras. Conquistador Christobal de Olid founded the town in 1524 near the present-day port city. The Conquistador of Mexico, Hernan Cortés, sent Olid to initiate the conquest of Honduras. However, Olid had other plans. He arrived in Honduras and tried to set up an independent state. Consequently, Cortés sent a new expedition headed by Francisco de las Casas to reestablish his authority. Olid was able to overcome and detain his rivals, but was then betrayed by his own men and assassinated. Cortés traveled to Honduras to resolve the struggle and set up his own government in the city of Trujillo before leaving in 1526. During the 16th century, pirates preying on Spanish ships plagued the area. By the early 1800s, the Garífuna, who were transported from the Bay Islands to Trujillo as laborers and who then dispersed along the coast of Honduras, were also well established in the Tela area.

Green Gold

By the middle of the 1800s, **bananas** were already the main economic activity in this town. In 1912, the Honduran government granted the **Tela Railroad Company** a huge land concession. This enabled the company to monopolize the banana industry in the area. Both the Tela Railroad Company and the **Standard Fruit Company** harvested bananas throughout

the north coast – thus dominating the country's economy and politics for decades. As a leading banana exporter, Honduras became known as the original "Banana Republic." Although the Tela Railroad Company moved its headquarters to La Lima in 1976, the old company buildings remain. Some are maintained and in use, but others, such as the old railroad building, have fallen into disrepair. These structures, Colonial architecture and modern edifices, blend in front of the warm sea, creating a tropical languor that makes Tela a fun place for a vacation.

Getting There

The main point of entrance to this area is La Ceiba's Golosón airport. However, most international flights require a stopover at the Ramon Villeda Morales Airport in San Pedro Sula, so I will explain how to begin your journey from both San Pedro and La Ceiba. Tela is halfway between San Pedro and La Ceiba and is about 60 miles (97 km) from each. The best way to travel is to take the bus or drive. Hitchhiking is not recommended as foreigners on foot, who are touting their backpacks or luggage, are easy targets for thieves. Although both Tela and La Ceiba have a tourist police force geared toward protecting and attending to travelers, wandering around on the highway on foot is just not a good idea. Bus rides to Tela take approximately an hour and a half. The trip takes about an hour in a car.

By Bus

From San Pedro Sula

There is no central bus station in San Pedro Sula, so ask your taxi driver to take you to the bus station. Taxis cost $2-3 in San Pedro Sula. Unfortunately, San Pedro has a high crime rate. Take a cab if you have your luggage with you. Barter with the driver if you know you're not going too far and try not to pay more than $2 for anywhere within the city. The agreed price includes tips.

Tela Express, 2 Ave, 1-2 Calle, in front of the Edificio Plaza or Plaza Building. Direct service between Tela and San Pedro Sula for $5. Operates Monday to Friday, at 8, 10 am, 1:30,

3:45, and 5:45 pm. Saturdays at 8 am, 9:30 am, 11, 1, 2:30, 4:30, and 6 pm. Sundays at 8 am, 9 am, 10 pm, 12 pm, 4:30 pm, and 8 pm.

Hedman Alas Bus Service, Barrio Guamilito 7 y 8 Ave, 3 Calle, San Pedro Sula, ☎ 553-1361, www.hedmanalas.com/spseng.htm, hedmanalas@hotmail.com.

Two buses a day to and from Tela, stopping at the airport on the way. The morning bus leaves San Pedro at 10 am for the airport and it leaves there at 10:50 am. The afternoon bus leaves San Pedro at 6:10 pm for the airport and leaves there at 6:50 pm. The cost from San Pedro is $7 and $8 from the airport.

The Hedman Alas terminal in Tela is at the Villas Telamar Resort, ☎ 448-0570. The buses leave Tela at 8 am and 12:45 pm, via the San Pedro Sula Airport.

Hedman Alas suggests you buy your ticket a day in advance and five days in advance during the Christmas and Easter Holidays.

Shuttle Service

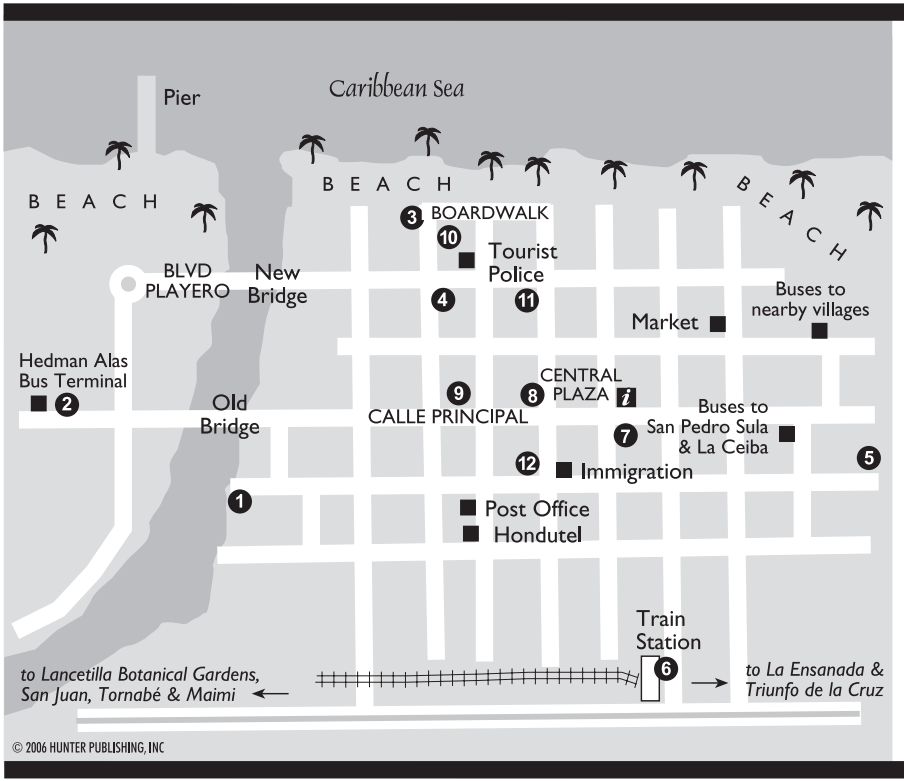
Many of the hotels provide their guests with shuttle service at an extra cost.

Garífuna Tours, Central Plaza, Tela. ☎ 448-1069, www.garifunatours.com, tours@honduras.com, info@garifunatours.com. Shuttle service from Tela to the San Pedro Airport and San Pedro for $9 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 7:30 am. They also offer private shuttles for a minimum of three people at $15 + 12% tax per person, with a 10% discount for more than four people.

From La Ceiba

Take a taxi to the central bus station (*estación de buses*) and take one of the buses (Catisa, Tupsa, or City) to San Pedro Sula. Try to take a direct or express bus (*el bus directo a San Pedro Sula*). The regular buses stop every two to five miles (three-eight km) to pick up and drop off passengers, who are often packed as tight as sardines.

When you get on your *directo* bus, ask the driver to let you off at the highway entrance to Tela. Take a taxi or walk about a mile north into town. On the regular bus (not direct), avoid early morning and late afternoon schedules that are the full-



Tela

1. Garífuna Museum, Restaurant, Mango Café
2. Hotel/Restaurant Villas Telmar
3. Hotel/Restaurant Sherwood
4. Hotel Sherwood Annex
5. Hotel/Restaurant Maya Vista
6. Gran Central
7. Hotel/Restaurant Presidente
8. Cafeteria Tuty's
9. Hotel/Restaurant Tela
10. Hotel Cesar's Mariscos
11. Coco Tours
12. Hotel Mango

N

est, and probably even a little dangerous. It is easy to pick a pocket when everyone is swaying against one another.

Shuttle Service

Garífuna Tours, Ave San Isidro 1ra Calle, La Ceiba. ☎ 440-3252, www.garifunatours.com, info@garifuna-tours.com. This operator provides a shuttle service between La Ceiba and Tela for $15 + 12% tax per person. They also offer a 10% discount for more than four people.

By Car

Car Rental at San Pedro Sula Airport	
Econocar, ☎ 668-1881	Hertz, ☎ 668-3156
Avis, ☎ 668-3164	
Car Rental in La Ceiba	
Toyota Rent-a-Car, airport, ☎ 443-4047	Budget Rent-a-Car, airport, ☎ 441-3398
Molinari Rent-a-Car, Hotel Paris, ☎ 443-0055	Tropical Rent-a-Car, Hotel La Quinta, ☎ 443-3071

Driving from San Pedro Sula

Take the only road out of the airport until you reach the four-lane highway. Follow the signs to El Progreso and you will be heading east. You'll cross the bridge over the Ulua River into El Progreso in about 20 minutes. Keep following the road. After a few blocks, you will come to a point where you have to turn either right or left. Turn left, heading north, and you are on the two-lane highway to Tela. Drive about another 30 minutes through the palm oil plantations, which are very recognizable by the neat rows of palms. The area after the farms is more built up and soon you'll begin to see the "Welcome to Tela" signs. A couple of miles later you'll see a sign, "Tela Centro," on the right side of the road with an arrow pointing north. The sign is opposite a corner Texaco gas station. Take a left at the gas station. The road (Calle Centro) leads straight into town.

From elsewhere in San Pedro Sula, get on the Ave Circunvalación or Inner Beltway and stay in the right lane

until you get to the turn off heading east to El Progreso. There are signs everywhere to guide your way. San Pedro Sula is a planned city. All the streets and avenues eventually lead to the original Inner Beltway and then to the newer Second Beltway. From San Pedro's Central Plaza, the street (1 Calle) runs west to east. You should head east, or toward the Cathedral, and across the railroad tracks, and keep going straight. This street eventually crosses the beltway onto the four-lane highway to El Progreso. In either case, follow the instructions in the previous paragraph when you get to El Progreso.

Driving from La Ceiba

Take the road out of the airport and turn left or west. You're on the road to Tela. Drive about an hour; after the "Welcome to Tela" sign take a right at the Texaco station.

WARNING FOR DRIVERS

You are embarking on a wondrous journey through tropical paradise. Just remember to keep your eyes on the road. What appears at times to be a country lane meandering through hills lush with vegetation and a view of the ocean in the distance is the main highway between three port cities and El Progreso. Every kind of vehicle imaginable can be found on this curvy passage: trucks coming out of the banana, palm oil, and pineapple fields, buses brimming with people, tractors, and even ox- and horse-driven carts. Wandering horses and herds of cattle also share this path. Towns and villages line the road, and there are invariably people standing on the roadside waiting for the bus, riding bicycles or walking around. Remember, half the population of Honduras is under 15. There are children everywhere. This is the highway where Lisa One-Eye Lopez, the singer, lost her life in a traffic accident.

Practicalities

Banking

Bancahsa, 3 Ave 9 Calle, cashes traveler's checks. Open weekdays 8:30 am to 3 pm and Saturday 8:30-11:30 am.

Banco Atlántida, 3 Ave 9 Calle, cashes traveler's checks and makes Visa card cash advances. Open weekdays 8:30 am to 3 pm and Saturday 8:30-11:30 am.

Medical Facilities

Centro Medico Cristiano, 9 Ave 7/8 Calle, ☎ 448-2456. Open 24 hours.

Clínica Medica Suyapa, south of 9 Calle, before the bridge. ☎ 448-2682. Open Monday to Friday 8 am to 6 pm and Saturday 8 am to noon.

Internet

The Mango Café, Tela Viejo, 8 Calle NE, and **Maya Vista**, Tela Nuevo, 10 Ave 9 Calle, Lempira Hill, both offer Internet use at a reasonable price.

Shopping

Casa del Sol, next to Cesar's Mariscos on the boardwalk, is a small souvenir store selling paintings, handicrafts and antiques.

Language Schools

Mango Café, 8 Calle NE, first floor below the Garífuna Museum, one block south of the Central Plaza, offers 20-hour Spanish courses for $99.

Bike Rentals

Garífuna Tours, **The Mango Café** and **Villas Telamar** all rent bicycles for about $8 a day or $4 for half a day.

Park Information

Prolansate, 3 Ave NE 9 Calle, ☎ 448-2042, www.prolansate.org. This non-profit organization runs two of the coastal parks and can provide useful information and maps of the area. Prolansate stands for the Foundation for the Protection of Lancetilla, Punta Sal, and Texiguat. The Foundation's offices are on the second floor of the Kawas

Building. On the first floor, a small gift shop sells mostly t-shirts with ecological themes. The organization also provides maps of the parks in the Tela Bay area.

Government Services

The **police station** is at 7 Ave 11 Calle, ☎ 448-2888 and is open 24 hours.

The **phone company** (Hondutel) is at 4 Ave 7-8 Calle NE, two blocks south and one block west of The centRal plaza and offers phone and fax services. Open daily from 8 am to 8 pm. The post office is located right next door to the phone company.

Museum

Garífuna Museum, 8 Calle NE, second floor Mango Café, includes exhibits of Garífuna culture and history, handicraft sales and a small art gallery.

Tour Operators

Garífuna Tours, Central Plaza, Tela, ☎ 448-1069, www.garifunatours.com, tours@honduras.com. This tour company offers a variety of tours with bilingual guides, nice boats and cars.

Coco Tours has two offices, one in Tela, Calle Guatemala and another in the Garífuna village of Triunfo de la Cruz, Barrio Tigre, ☎ 448-1541, 989-6847, taradas007@yahoo.fr. They offer tours to all the parks in and around Tela.

The **Tonina Blanca Cooperative** in Triunfo de La Cruz offers tour services to the different parks. You can go fishing with them, or take boat trips close to the community, the Punta Izopo or Jeannette Kawas Park for between Lps. 10 (50¢) and Lps. 600 ($30), depending on where you want to go and what you want to do. Ask your hotel manager to arrange a boat ride or a tour for you.

Another option is the **Boater's Association**, ☎ 448-2217, which offers boat rides through all the sea and lagoon areas for a modest price. These last two options are great ways to support the local economy.

Jeannette Kawas National Park

The Jeannette Kawas National Park (JKNP) is on the western side of Tela Bay and stretches from the Garífuna village of Miami to the tip of the Punta Sal peninsula. The park was formerly known as the Punta Sal National Park but was renamed after Jeannette Kawas, who was murdered in 1995 because of her opposition to the environmental destruction in the area. She founded and was president of the non-profit organization, Prolansate, which now manages several protected areas in the Tela Bay area.

JKNP is one of the largest protected areas in Central America. The park covers a 302-sq-mile (781-sq-km) area, and encompasses a coastal lagoon system, mangrove forests, channels, flooded plains, coral reefs, tropical rainforest, and rock and sand beaches.

A 1993 inventory of wildlife in the park counted 70 species of fish, 47 species of mammals, and 103 species of amphibians. The most abundant group of animals registered was birds, with 273 different species. Adding these to other species counted in the Lancetilla Botanical Garden brings the total number of bird species found in the Tela Bay area to 345. This represents roughly 50% of the birds reported in Honduras. Eighteen of the 20 orders of birds found in Honduras are present in Tela Bay. Among these are different species of herons, egrets, pelicans, storks, hawks, eagles, owls, macaws, parrots and parakeets, oropendolas, as well as the colorful roseate spoonbill and the shy toucan.

Miami Village

The Garífuna village of Miami is in the park on the sand bar between the lagoon and the ocean. This idyllic fishing village is reminiscent of Garífuna villages of yesteryear where the homes have bamboo walls and thatched roofs, and the tools of survival such as dugout canoes and fishing nets can be seen lying in the sand. This is a good place to have lunch. Several small home restaurants with bamboo tables and stools placed outside, usually under a thatched roof, offer delicious and fresh seafood platters for less than $5. You might even be able to buy a bag of coconut bread straight out of the oven.

The modest **visitor's center** in Miami has various displays describing the different ecosystems and wildlife found in the park, which an attendant will explain to you if you ask.

Getting There

Getting to Miami and the park is not easy unless you have a 4x4 vehicle. Arranging a tour through one of the local tour operators is the best option. For about US$25 per person, most tours of the park include transportation and the entrance fee. The tours usually include either a walk through the mangroves or a short boat trip from Miami through narrow channels that penetrate the dense, tangled roots of the mangrove forest bringing you suddenly to enormous **Los Micos Lagoon**. Many different species of birds, such as kingfishers, herons and storks, feed on the sand bar separating the lagoon from the sea.

> **Tip:** In the lagoon, the best times to view monkeys, in particular, and birds is in the early morning or late afternoon.

You can also take a boat trip across the bay to the tip of the peninsula, **Punta Sal**. In Punta Sal, you can explore secluded coves, which were once the favorite hiding place of pirates, roam the beaches, climb the hills for a spectacular view of the Bay, and even snorkel on corral reefs. Howler monkeys and many species of birds are clearly visible in this area; however, you might have to climb one of the hills to see the monkeys. Both dolphins and manatees (sea cows) inhabit the Punta Sal marine area. As with most wildlife in most places, the manatees were once more common throughout the park area. One guide told me that when he grew up in Miami, the manatee would let the children ride on their backs.

> **Interesting Wildlife:** 85 hanging chestnut-headed oropendola nests were counted on just one tree in Punta Sal.

Punto Izopo National Park

Just 7½ miles (12 km) east of Tela is this park, named after the hill that emerges from the sea, Izopo Mountain. The area

is dominated by lush foliage fed by the waters of the Plátano and Hicaque rivers. Teeming wildlife can be observed from sea kayaks that take you quietly into the area through mangrove channels. View the monkeys, parrots, toucans, and crocodiles as you glide through the park.

Getting There

Again, taking a tour to this area is recommended. Many local tour operators offer daily tours.

ENVIRONMENTAL TIDBIT

The Convention on Wetlands came into force for Honduras on October 23, 1993. On March 28, 1995, the Jeanette Kawas National Park was designated site no. 722 on "The Annotated RAMSAR List of Wetlands of International Importance." On March 20, 1996, the Punta Izopo Wildlife Refuge was designated Site No. 812. Honduras presently has five sites designated as Wetlands of International Importance, with a surface area of 179,680 hectares (444,000 acres).

Lancetilla Botanical Garden & Research Center

For Birdwatchers: If you would like to get in the park earlier than 7 am, make previous arrangements with one of the guides to meet you there.

The United Fruit Company originally established the Lancetilla Botanical Garden and Research Center in 1926. The purpose of the Center was researching banana diseases and new agricultural possibilities. The park is now the second-largest botanical garden in world.

Dr. William Popenoe was the station's first director and he introduced many new species of plants to Honduras. Rubber plants, disease-resistant bananas, and African palms were brought from East Asia. African palm plantations today form

a vital part of the north coast economy. Palm oil is used to produce vegetable oil, margarine, and soap. A common fruit crop in Honduras is the lychee, which was originally brought from China.

Research was carried out on tropical timbers such as mahogany, cypress, Burmese rosewood, and tropical pines. Cacao, sugar cane, spices, nuts, and a collection of medicinal plants were experimentally planted. Popenoe made several valuable contributions to the Honduran economy. One instance is when he and a Cuban friend were able to raise the quality of Honduran cigars to meet international standards. They did this by conducting research and experimentation in the Copán tobacco region in Western Honduras.

Covering 16 sq miles (41.54 sq km) or 3,165 acres, the garden is divided into two sections: the Wilson Popenoe Arboretum, which includes an Experimental Plantation, and the Biological Reserve.

The **William Popenoe Arboretum** covers 103 acres and contains the largest collection of Asian fruit plants in Mesoamerica, with 636 species. Orchids, bamboos, palms, mangos, as well as the largest plantation of Mangosteen or Garcinia Mangostanam. Mangosteen is a small red tropical fruit with juicy, fleshy seeds. You open the fruit and eat the seeds. The Honduran variety is particularly good. The fruit is also used for pharmaceutical purposes.

The **Experimental Plantation** is divided into plots in a 793-acre area, where more than 60 different species of timber and exotic fruits have been growing for over 40 years. This is the oldest Honduran plantation, which also contains a research laboratory for teaching forestry.

The **Biological Reserve** covers 3,165 acres. It is divided into two ecosystems, a tropical rainforest, and a subtropical rainforest. Some 85% of this area is unexplored secondary forest, which is home to an abundance of wildlife, and includes hundreds of bird species, plus mammals such as howler monkeys and jaguars, as well as reptiles, fish and insects.

Walking Tours

Walks through the park can vary from one to three hours. A well-marked trail runs through the reserve, winding up at a natural watering hole in the Lancetilla River. Take a dip to freshen up after your walk.

Birdwatchers can hang out on the different trails to see the many species found in the park.

There are three trails in the Biological Reserve.

El Ceibon Trail: This trail boasts the two oldest and largest Ceiba trees on the north coast of Honduras. Each trunk has a circumference of approximately 72 feet (24 m) and is about 165 feet (55 m) tall. The trunk and branches host plants such as bromeliads, ferns, and orchids. Toucans, oropendolas, howler monkeys, and squirrels can be seen on this trail, which leads to one of oldest dams found in the area. The dam was built by the United Fruit Company to supply water to their installations, the city of Tela, and surrounding areas. The trail is two km long (1.2 miles) and can take two hours to cover.

The Dam Trail: This rustic trail leads to the new dam that was built in 1940 to meet the water demand for the city of Tela and surrounding areas.

The Community Trail: This trail is an old access street that joins the main road in Lancetilla with communities to the south of the reserve. It takes you through a rainforest, which has numerous creeks, and is home to many species of birds and mammals. It takes about two hours to cover.

A Christmas Bird Count is held every year in December in the Lancetilla Botanical Gardens. Enthusiastic bird-watchers from all over the world participate in this activity. Initiated in 1990, the counting is sponsored by the Audubon Society and organized by the Peace Corps Volunteer

(PCV), Kendall Young, and university professor and ex-PCV, Pilar Thorn. If you would like to participate in this event, contact Carolina Alduvin at carolinalduvin@hotmail.com.

Getting There

On the main highway, catch one of the buses traveling to San Pedro Sula. Ask the driver to drop you off at the park entrance. Rent a bicycle and ride three miles (five km) on the highway to San Pedro Sula and the reserve.

Park offices, ☎/fax 448-1740, are open from Monday to Friday 7 am to 4 pm, and guide services are available from Monday to Sunday 8 am to 3:30 pm. The entrance fee is US$6 and includes the optional guide service.

I recommend using the guide service. Guides know the names of the plants and birds, which birds like what plants, and where they can be found. They also provide interesting history. You can wander about on your own after completing the guided tour.

Where to Stay in Tela

Note: Reservations are a must during Easter Week (Semana Santa) and other important Honduran Holidays when these places are full.

$$$ **Hotel Villas Telamar**, Tela Nuevo, ☎ 448-2196, toll-free in the US, ☎ 800-742-9276, www.villastelamar.com, telamar@simon.intertel.hn. This hotel is in the old fruit company compound and offers 40 double rooms, 17 apartments with kitchen, 40 villas sleeping up to 14 people each, with two to five bedrooms in each, with a/c, TV, phone. The villa area is a picturesque setting of houses on stilts among shade trees. Children can run around safely or ride bicycles on the lanes between the houses that are neatly arranged in rows. One restaurant is set close to the pools, while the other is a gazebo on the beach. Facilities and sports include horseback riding, four tennis courts, boating, fishing, water-skiing, two pools, a sauna, a Jacuzzi, a nine-hole golf course, and a game room. Other services

include baby-sitting, doctor on call, currency exchange, conference facilities, boutiques, laundromat and souvenir shops.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.	
	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	US$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

$$ **Hotel Sherwood**, next to Cesar Mariscos, on the beach boardwalk, ☎ 448-1065, www.hotelsherwood.com. The Sherwood offers 18 rooms with ocean view, a/c, TV, (some rooms have private balconies), pool, tours of parks, shuttle services, and a five-hour Spanish course that includes a day-tour to one of the parks or a Garífuna town.

$$ **Gran Hotel Presidente**, south side of Municipal Building, ☎ 448-2821, 448-2671, 448-1035, fax 448-2992, impdetur@hondutel.hn, www.laceibaonline.net/hotelpresidente-tela/hotel-main.htm. There are 42 double rooms, a/c, phone, hot water, pool, and Internet access. Also offers tours to national parks. This is a comfortable hotel close to all downtown amenities.

$$ **Hotel Maya Vista**, Tela Nuevo, 10 Ave 9 Calle, Lempira Hill, ☎/fax 448-1497, www.mayavista.com. This small hotel offers nine comfortable rooms, some with full kitchen facilities, overlooking the ocean, TV. Each room is on a different floor, providing extra privacy. It's a French-Canadian family-operated hotel perched on hill with a view of the bay and town. The rooftop lookout tower provides a spectacular 360-degree view. Rates depend on room and occupancy. English, Spanish, and French are spoken. Additional services include private parking, Internet access, a hammock patio, laundry service, and shuttle service from San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba airports. An open-deck restaurant serves tropical cocktails, breakfast, lunch, and dinner

$$ **Hotel y Restaurante Cesar Mariscos**, Tela Viejo, Barrio El Centro, Ave Uruguay, on Beach Boardwalk, ☎ 448-1934, www.hotelcesarmariscos.com, cesarmariscos@yahoo.com. This hotel and restaurant is the favorite option of many locals traveling to Tela and offers 15 rooms with ocean view and one

apartment. Very clean, tastefully decorated, and comfortable. Rates include breakfast and taxes. Restaurant, Internet, conference room, pool, Jacuzzi, shuttle services, tours of national parks, laundry, and a safe box in each room

$$ **Hotel Gran Central**, Tela Viejo, Ave Honduras, opposite the train station ☎ 448-1099, info@grancentral.com, www.grancentral.com. Seven rooms with kitchens, cable TV, a/c, private safety box, and private terrace. Refurbished Colonial building with huge, stylish rooms makes for a comfortable stay. Offers tours to park areas.

$ **Mango Café Bed & Breakfast**, Tela Viejo, 8 Calle NE, first floor below the Garífuna Museum, one block south of the Central Plaza, ☎ 448-0338, mango@honduras.com, www.mangocafe.net. This B&B is a favorite hangout of international travelers and offers 10 double rooms with fan, some with a/c and TV, 20-hour Spanish classes, Internet services, international calls, and bicycle rentals. The hotel's riverside restaurant has tables overlooking the water, and features Italian and Honduran specialties with breakfast starting at 7 am. The music bar organizes regular evenings of Garífuna music and dancing.

Hotel Tela, Tela Viejo, ☎ 448-2150. This is one of the oldest hotels in town and offers airy and large rooms with two beds, private bath with hot water, and fan.

Where to Eat

Tela offers a wide variety of eateries. Foreign-owned establishments offer international platters, while the local mainstay is seafood.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.	
$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

$$-$$$ **Restaurant Villas Telamar**, Tela Nuevo, ☎ 448-2196, serves international and seafood platters. Open Monday through Sunday from 7 am to 11 pm, they serve buffet lunch on the weekend and have live music and dance during the evening. **Restaurant/Bar El Delfin**, open 9 am to

11 pm, has a limited lunch menu and drinks in an open-air gazebo on the beach. These restaurants tend to get quite crowded and the service is slow. Although the menus are extensive, the food is not as first-class as touted. I got margarine instead of butter with the toast the last time I had breakfast there.

$-$$ **Cesar Mariscos**, Tela Viejo, Barrio El Centro, Ave Uruguay, on Beach Boardwalk. International menu, specializing in fresh seafood. Open Monday through Sunday from 7 am to 11 pm. The excellent service and great food makes this restaurant a favorite.

$$ **Restaurant Hotel Sherwood**, on the Beach Boardwalk, offers an international menu, a nice atmosphere and a friendly staff. However, the food could be improved; their paella tastes more like chicken and rice. It's best to stick to the seafood or breakfast. Open Monday through Sunday from 7 am to 10 pm.

$ **Cafeteria Tuty's**, Central Plaza, across from Garífuna Tours. Open 7 am to 10 pm, closed Sunday, they're famous for their great breakfasts and natural fruits juices.

Restaurante Garífuna, 8 Calle NE, next door to the Garífuna Museum. Well-prepared typical food, seafood platter, conch soup, yucca, and cassava.

$$ **Restaurant Maya Vista**, 9 Calle, 10 Ave, Lempira Hill, ☎/fax 448-1497, ☎ 448-1928, www.mayavista.com. Excellent Canadian cooking featuring pasta and seafood, great cocktails, a relaxing atmosphere and spectacular view of Tela Bay. This hotel and restaurant are definitely worth the visit, if just for the view. Open daily from 9 am to 9 pm.

$-$$ **Mango Café**, 8 Calle NE, first floor below the Garífuna Museum, one block south of the Central Plaza. This Music Bar and Restaurant is a favorite with travelers. It serves Garífuna, Honduran, and Italian food, such as lasagna, fish fillet with white wine and Tapado, a Garífuna soup made from seafood and coconut milk. Open Monday to Saturday from 7 am to 10 pm, Sundays from 8 am to 3 pm.

Garífuna Communities East of Tela

La Ensenada

A one-hour walk east along the beach from town leads to the Garífuna village of La Ensenada. Another half an hour and you're in Triunfo de la Cruz. The Garífuna, who conserve their cultural heritage, live mostly in thatched huts in communities along the beach and make their living from the sea. Learn a little about their culture by listening to their language, enjoying their food, and experiencing first-hand the pulsating "punta" dance.

La Ensenada, in a small bay area, is a fun place when the tide goes down. Explore the sand for seashells and observe ocean critters scurrying around. Just make sure you get back to shore before the tide comes in. It's a favorite local spot that gets quite crowded on the weekends as busloads of visitors arrive from the surrounding areas.

Where to Stay

$ **Budari**, ☎ 996-1153, on the beach, offers double rooms with private baths, air conditioning or fans, plus a pool, bar, and restaurant.

Where to Eat

$-$$ The beach at La Ensenada is lined with outdoor thatch-roofed eateries or *champas*, offering delicious fried fish accompanied with fried plantains, *marinera* (seafood) and conch soup at modest prices.

Triunfo de la Cruz

Farther east from La Ensenada is Triunfo de la Cruz, which is within the Punta Izopo National Park, where you will find the Triunfo de la Cruz hill, the Black Lagoon and the Hicaque and Plátano rivers. Triunfo is the largest community around Tela, with a population of 9,000 people.

Where to Stay

$ **Cabañas y Restaurante Colón**. Next door to Comedor Meruwa on beach number 5. Offers private apartments with fans.

$ **Panchy Cabins and Restaurante**. Just past the Colón Restaurant on beach number five.

$ **Cabañas y Comedor Palacio**. A little farther down from Panchy's on the beach.

$$ **Caribbean Coral Inn Street**, ☎ 994-9806, fax/☎ 448-2942, www.caribbeancoralinn.com, caribcoral@globalnet.hn. Five cabins, private bath, hot water, TV, breakfast included, restaurant, gym, conference room, laundry, transfers, secure parking. Rates for double occupancy.

Where to Eat

$ **Comedor de Anselmo Chavez**. At the entrance to Triunfo de la Cruz, closest to the beach in front of the Buda disco. Seafood, traditional platters, beef, and chicken.

$ **Comedor Los Amigos de Silva**. To the right of the entrance to Triunfo, closest to the beach next door to Buda disco. Seafood, traditional platters, beef, and chicken.

$ **Comedor Don Bocho**. To the left of the Community Center (Centro Comunal).

$ **Comedor Meruwa**. On beach number 5. Seafood, traditional platters, beef, and chicken.

$ **Restaurant Playa Miramar**. At the end of the town toward the Cerro Triunfo de la Cruz (hill). Offers seafood, traditional platters, beef, and chicken.

Garífuna Communities West of Tela

You can either drive, take the bus (8-9 Ave, 10 Calle in Tela) or rent a bicycle and ride there along the sandy coastal road to reach these communities.

Tornabé

This community of nearly 4,000 residents is about five miles (eight km) from Tela, between the ocean and the Laguna Quemada, a little over four miles (seven km) from Jeannette Kawas National Park.

Where to Stay

$$ **Lamidi Hati (Half Moon) Hotel**. Contact Jose Arriola, :arriolatornabe@aol.com, ☎ 914-282-9141, www.tornabe-hotel.com/index.html. This small Garífuna hotel has six rooms. Each room has a beachside balcony, private bath, two

beds (one queen and one full size), ceiling fans, a/c, closet, and a television. Don Jose, the owner, caters to his guests to make their visit a special one. Highly recommended for a peaceful stay and the opportunity to experience nature and the local culture.

$$ **The Last Resort**, ☎ 984-3964. Right on a beautiful white sand beach where the Laguna Quemada flows into the sea. Bungalows with private bath, hot water, fan and a/c, and an excellent restaurant. Easy access to Garífuna communities.

San Juan

San Juan offers diverse activities to the traveler. Enjoy a day at the beach and lunch in one of the many eateries along the shore.

Where to Stay

$$$ **Honduras Shores Plantation**, in San Juan, a Garífuna community west of Tela, is a planned beach community offering a vacation rentals and the Tela Beach Club, which consists of a restaurant/bar, pool, and beach that are perfect for a day of beach fun. Accommodations include one and two bedrooms, small villas with fully equipped kitchen, living room with futon sofa that sleeps two, a/c, cable TV, and private bathroom with hot water. Kayaking and fishing are available on the lagoon, which is at the southern end of the property. There is also a boat launch ramp and dock.

$$$ **El Cocal** is between San Juan and Tornabé, www.elcocal.net, reservaciones@hotelsula.hn. The 12-acre beachfront property is available for rent on a weekly or monthly basis. There are 14 bedrooms, 13 bathrooms, a large living room, and open wrap-around porch with central balcony and ocean view. Maintenance and security staff. Transportation to and from San Pedro airport included. US$2,233 weekly or $60 per room per night, five-room minimum, four persons maximum per room. An additional 4½-acre eco-refuge set on Laguna Quemada includes a 300-foot (91-m) boardwalk and dock for fishing and stargazing.

$ **Los Micos**, San Juan, west of Tela. In San Juan, follow the road west to where it ends at the mouth of the lagoon. Take the only (small, dirt) road left, which leads to the hotel. This small hotel owned by Carlos Ferrer offers cabins with one

bedroom, private bath, kitchenette, and living room. There are rooms with private bath and a/c or with private bath and no a/c. Popular with travelers staying longer. This is a fun place to stay. Restaurant/bar on premises as well as a floating bar with barbecue that you can rent. You just have to provide the food and drink.

Where to Eat

As in all Garífuna communities, eateries dot the beach.

CASSAVA

Cassava is a typical Garífuna food made from yucca, a semi-permanent crop found in tropical and subtropical regions. A basic food crop, yucca grows in poor soil where other crops will not. It needs little water, fertilizers or pesticides and can be harvested any time between eight and 24 months after planting.

Once harvested, yucca rapidly goes bad. It should be eaten or prepared quickly. Although some varieties can be eaten raw or cooked like potatoes, many have a high level of poisonous liquid cyanide that must be eliminated before the yucca is edible. Homemade cassava is made by Garífuna women, who peel the yucca with a machete, and then bend over a large board covered with small white quartz stones to grate it. Experts say the Garífunas and their ancestors have been using this method for over 3,000 years. The grated yucca is then packed into a *ruguma*, a long woven tube, which has one end tied to a tree. A stick is pushed through the bottom of the tube. Children then sit on the protruding stick so they can pull the tube tight and squeeze out the poison. The squeezed-out yucca is removed from the *ruguma* and dried overnight. The next day, the yucca is sifted through a large basket and placed on a griddle for baking. While baking, it is turned once, then sprinkled with refined yucca flour on the top. Recently, I bought a small bag of toasted cassava pieces coated with garlic as a snack. I was impressed. During your visit to a Garífuna community, it's fun to watch the cassava-producing process.

■ La Ceiba

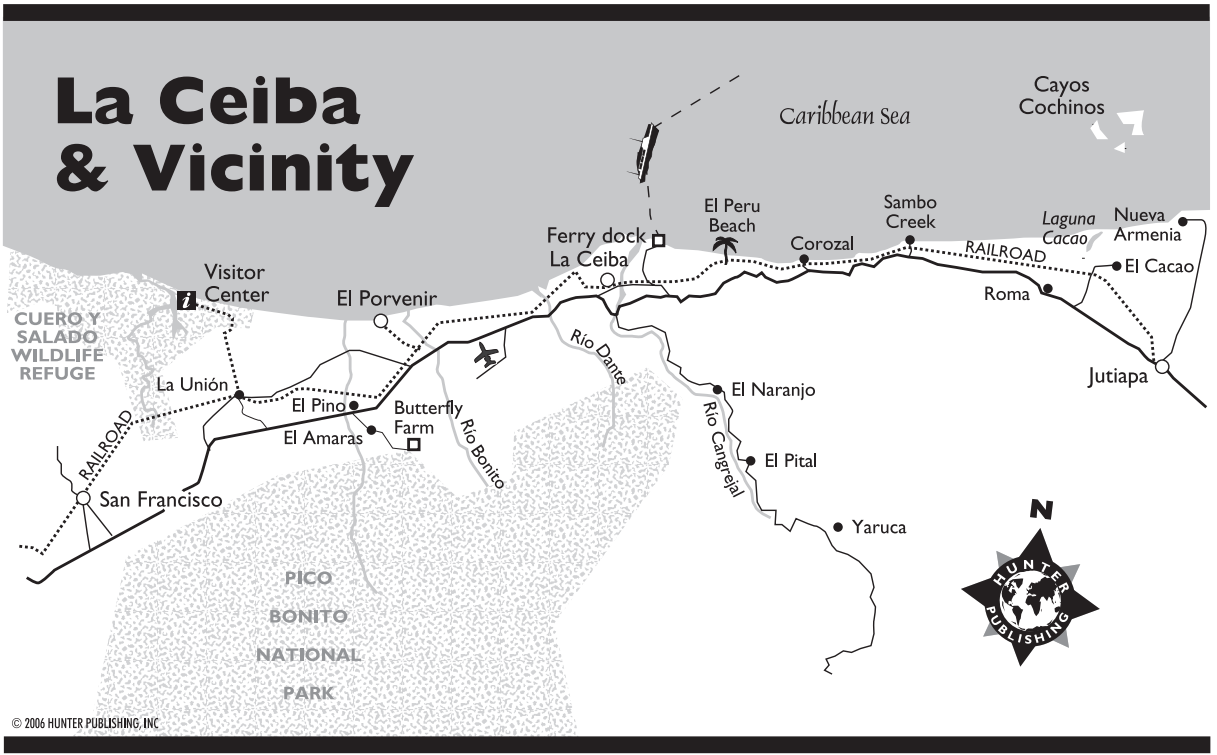
"Tegucigalpa thinks, San Pedro Sula works, and La Ceiba plays" is a popular Honduran saying, which sums up perfectly the ambiance found in La Ceiba. The famous Zona Viva, where most of the nightlife is found, is on Ave San Isidro. This street, just a block from the ocean, runs adjacent to the coast. Listen to the waves pounding as you sip a cool beer. The city is home to an interesting cultural mix of people. Some of the languages often heard include Garífuna, Creole English, and Miskito.

CARNAVAL

The third week of May is carnival time in La Ceiba. *Carnaval* is the celebration honoring the city's patron saint, San Isidro. Different neighborhoods around town host dancing street parties throughout the week. On Saturday, a huge parade with floats runs down Ave San Isidro culminating the event. Bands on stages along the Ave play all night long to the approximately 200,000 visitors that flock to the city during this time. In 2004, La Ceiba also inaugurated a new event, **The Love and Friendship Festival**, which is held during Valentine's Day week.

This vibrant port city is primarily an agricultural and commercial town that produces bananas, pineapples and other fruits for export. More recently, the Honduran government and private enterprise are heavily promoting eco-tourism.

The opportunity to engage in nature activities near and around La Ceiba abound. You can hike the nearly 8,000-foot (2,438-m) Pico Bonito in the city's backdrop, go white-water river rafting on the Cangregal River (Class II, III and IV rapids), or visit the Cuero y Salado Wildlife Reserve. A short boat ride will take you to the Cayos Cochinos Marine Reserve. Spend the day in Corozal or Sambo Creek, Garífuna communities on the seashore, for a unique cultural experience and a great meal!


La Ceiba & Vicinity
Caribbean Sea
Cayos Cochinos
El Peru Beach
Sambo Creek
Laguna Cacao
Nueva Armenia
Ferry dock La Ceiba
Corozal
RAILROAD
El Cacao
Roma
Visitor Center
El Porvenir
CUERO Y SALADO WILDLIFE REFUGE
Río Dante
Jutiapa
La Unión
El Pino
Butterfly Farm
El Amaras
Río Bonito
El Naranjo
Río Cangrejal
RAILROAD
San Francisco
El Pital
Yaruca
PICO BONITO NATIONAL PARK
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From the La Ceiba airport, you can catch short and inexpensive flights to the Bay Islands of Roatán, Guanaja, or Utila. A new dock also provides two ferry services to the islands and daily flights are available to the Moskitia.

History

This city was named after a ceiba tree, which was on the beach and was so gigantic the first Garífuna settlers said the tree was "The ladder God used when he came down from Heaven to visit Earth."

The city of La Ceiba was officially established in 1877. As the center of the banana industry and the region's economic center, La Ceiba today is third-largest city in Honduras.

Getting There & Getting Around

By Air

There are no direct international flights to La Ceiba and few to the Bay Islands. But many connecting flights are available from San Pedro Sula, Tegucigalpa, and the Bay Islands. For connecting to the Bay Islands or any major city, call one of the airlines listed below.

Isleña, ☎ 443-0179

Sosa, ☎ 443-1399

Atlantic, ☎ 440-1220

By Bus

From Tela

Hedman Alas Bus Service, Villas Telamar, ☎ 448-0570. Departures to La Ceiba at 7:30 am, 11:30 am, and 3:30 pm.

Cristina, CA-13 highway, ☎ 448-1300. Departures to La Ceiba every hour from 10:30 am to 8:30 pm

Regular bus routes (with stops along the way) are another option. Go to the bus stop just outside of town on the CA-13 highway, and catch any of the buses going to La Ceiba.

La Ceiba
Caribbean Sea
MAZAPAN SCHOOL
7 CALLE
Train Station
CENTRAL PARK
8 CALLE
9 CALLE
11 CALLE
12 CALLE
13 CALLE
14 CALLE
15 CALLE
AVE SAN ISIDRO
AVE REPUBLICA
AVE MORAZAN
AVE VALLE SUR
CEMETERY
Police
Viana & City Bus Terminals
Post Office
to Megaplaza Mall, Hedman Alas Bus Terminal, Tourist Police
to Butterfly Museum
to Tela
NOT TO SCALE
La Moskitia Eco-Adventures
Mayart
Hondutel
AVE 14 DE JULIO
AVE BASTILLA
STADIUM
Rainforest Souvenirs
Centro Internacional de Idiomas (Spanish School)
Central American Spanish School
Souvenirs Valle de Angeles
1 CALLE
2 CALLE
3 CALLE
4 CALLE
5 CALLE
6 CALLE
7 CALLE
AVE 15 DE SEPTIEMBRE
AVE PEDRO NUFIO
AVE DIONISIO DE HERRERA
AVE MANUEL BONILLA
AVE JUAN RAMON
AVE MIGUEL PAZ BARAHONA
AVE DOMINGO VAZQUEZ
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From San Pedro Sula

● Express Buses

Hedman Alas Bus Service, Barrio Guamilito, 7 y 8 Ave 3 Calle, San Pedro Sula, ☎ 553-1361, www.hedmanalas.com. Daily departures to La Ceiba at 6 am, 10:20, 2:20, and 6 pm.

Viana Clase Oro, Ave Circunvalación, La Lima Exit, 200 yards from Wendy's, ☎ 556-9261. Daily departures to La Ceiba at 10:30 am, and 5:45 pm.

● Regular Bus Routes (stop along the way)

Diana/Rey Express, Barrio Concepción, 4 Ave SE, 4 Calle, in front of the Hotel Maya Imperial, ☎ 550-8355. Daily departures to La Ceiba at 6:30 am, 7:30, 9:30, 10:30, 12:30 pm, 1:30, 2:30, 4:30, and 5:30 pm.

Catisa-Tupsa, 2 Ave, 5 and 8 Calle, SO, ☎ 552-1042. Daily departures every hour 5:30 am to 6:30 pm.

By Car

Renting a car in La Ceiba to see the sights is a good idea if your time is limited. La Ceiba is a medium-sized city and getting to any of the various attractions can be time-consuming.

Car Rental Agencies

Molinari, Gran Hotel Paris, ☎ 443-0055.

Avis, La Ceiba Airport, ☎ 441-2802.

By Sea

Lagoon Marina, ☎/fax 440-0614.VHF Channel 69, lagoonma@tropicohn.com, lagoonmarina@psinet.hn. This marina is touted as being one of the best in Honduras and is south of Muelle de Cabotaje in a well-protected lagoon. It's managed by Tony and Rita Vorleiter, who, after roaming the high seas, decided to settle here. Lagoon Marina provides 20 slips at the dock, all including electricity and water. It also offers transport to town (1.9 miles/three km). Other services include repair facilities, chandlery, 24-hour security, fuel, showers and toilets, swimming pool, gas bottle filling, laundry, travel agency, Internet access and mail service. Contact in advance to check for berth availability.

La Ceiba Shipyard, Puerto Muelle de Cabotaje, ☎ 991-6175, fax 441-2775, www.laceibaonline.net/laceibashipyard, shipyard@laceiba.com. Services include boatyard storage, launching ramp, storage containers (20-foot), hull thickness testing, 110VAC 60Hz service, 220VAC 60Hz service, 220VAC welding outlets, and water hookup. Internet access and port paperwork services are free of charge.

Practicalities

Banking

BGA, Plaza de Sol Mall, two blocks north of the Central Plaza on Ave San Isidro, cashes traveler's checks. Open Monday to Friday, 9 am to 4 pm, Saturdays 9-11:30 am.

Banco Ficohsa, 8 Calle, west of The centRal plaza, cashes traveler's checks.

Credomatic, San Isidro Ave, 5-6 Calle, Visa and MasterCard cash advances. Open Monday to Friday 9 am to 5 pm, Saturday 9 am to noon. ATM on the corner of Ave San Isidro and 5 Calle, for American Express, MasterCard, and Visa.

Medical Facilities & Pharmacies

Políclinica Ceibeña, Ave Morazán Sur (South), #88, ☎ 443-0244. A private hospital with 24-hour emergency room.

Hospital D'Antoni, Ave Morazán, ☎ 443-2264, www.hospitaldantoni.com, is the largest private hospital in the region offering a full array of medical services and a 24-hour emergency room.

Usha and the Fig Tree Medical Center, 15 miles (24 km) east of La Ceiba, ☎ 440 0041. Take the highway east toward Trujillo for 15 miles (24 km) east of La Ceiba. At the 225-km marker, you'll see the center's sign on the right side of the road. Turn right onto the dirt road that leads to the center. Dr. Sebi offers rehabilitation services and a rejuvenation center founded on a vegetarian diet, medication, and submersion in natural hot springs found at the center. Admission to the springs is about $2 for 15 minutes.

Farmacia Monroy, Ave 14 de Julio, Clínicas Especializadas Building, ☎ 443-1376.

Farmacia Suyapa, Barrio El Centro, in front of the Cafeteria Cobel, ☎ 443-2466.

Internet Access

Hondusoft, Panayotti Shopping Center, Barrio El Centro, Open Monday to Friday from 8 am to 10 pm, Saturday from 8 am to 6 pm.

La Ceiba Internet Café, Barrio El Iman, Figurama Building, next to Computeck, about 500 yards north of Expatriates, ☎ 440-1505, offers Internet and a full range of computer services, as well as international phone calls. Open Monday to Saturday 9 am to 8 pm.

Computek Cyber Café, Megaplaza Mall. The café is on the ground floor, next to Mega Supermarket, and offers a full range of Internet and computer services in a nice air-conditioned ambience. Open daily 10 am-8 pm.

Language Schools

Both the following schools offer home stays with local families, and one-on-one or group classes. Ask them about discounts and tour activities.

Centro Internacional de Idiomas, Barrio Solares Nuevos, Ave San Isidro and 13 Calle, Previsa Building, ☎ 440-1557, info@hondurasspanish.com or cii@laceiba.com, www.hondurasspanish.com. It has air-conditioned classrooms, and offers all levels of tailored language programs in La Ceiba and Utila. Rates in La Ceiba are $140-$220 a week, which includes materials, classes, airport pick-up, and optional home stay with three meals a day.

Central American Spanish School, Ave San Isidro, 12 and 13 Calle, ☎ 440-1707, www.ca-spanish.com, info@ca-spanish.com or cass@laceiba.com. Offers programs in Utila, Roatán, Copán and La Ceiba, as well as their Maya Beach combination program. Rates in La Ceiba are $150-$220 a week, which includes materials, instruction, free Internet access, airport pick-up and optional home stay with three meals a day.

Laundry Services

Lavandería Super Clean, Ave San Isidro, 16 C.

Government Services

The **police station** is at 15 de Septiembre Blvd., next to the central bus station, ☎ 441-0795, or 199. Open 24 hours a day. The **telephone company (Hondutel)** is at 5/6 Calle, three blocks east of Ave San Isidro, and is open 6 am to 9 pm. The **post office** is on Ave Morazán and 13 Calle, south of The centRal plaza. Open Monday to Friday, 8 am to 3 pm, Saturday, 8 am to noon. **EMS Express Mail** is in the same building as the post office and is open Monday to Friday 8 am to 3 pm and Saturday 8 am to noon. The **Immigration Office** is on Ave 14 Julio, 1-2 Calle, ☎ 442-0638. It's open weekdays from 8 am to noon and from 2 to 4 pm.

Information

The **Municipal Tourism Office**, 1 Calle, ☎ 440-3045, is open Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 5 pm, and Saturday, 8 am to noon.

Tour Operators

Both of the following operators are highly recommended.

Omega Tours, Barrio El Centro, ☎ 440-0334, www.omegatours.hn, omegatour@laceiba.com. This company offers a Jungle Lodge and day tours around La Ceiba, as well as multi-day tours to other eco-adventure destinations.

La Moskitia Eco-Aventuras, Plaza Caracol Hotel, Ave 14 de Julio, on the corner in front of Zona Viva, ☎ 440-2124, www.honduras.com/moskitia. Offers day tours and multi-destination tours. Ecological consciousness is a priority in operations, this company is rated as excellent by the tourism industry.

Shopping

For shopping, you might try the new **Megaplaza Mall**, Colonia Toronjal, next to Banco Atlántida building,

Souvenirs

Rainforest Souvenir, Calle La Julia, off 9 Calle, ☎ 443-2917.

Mayart, Ave San Isidro .

Souvenirs Valle de Angles, Ave San Isidro corner of 13 C.

Expatriates for Cigars, Barrio El Iman, at the end of 12th Calle, ☎ 443-2272.

Supermarkets

Palmira, 6 C. This very large supermarket is open Monday to Saturday 7 am to 7 pm and Sunday 7 am to noon.

Supermarket Super Ceibeño has two locations – one next to the Palmira Supermarket and another one block north of The centRal plaza. Both are open Monday to Saturday, 7 am to 7 pm, and Sundays, 7 am to noon.

Adventures on the River

Río Cangrejal

Just east of La Ceiba flows the Cangrejal River, which is considered one of the best for rafting in Central America. Or, if you just want to enjoy a cool dip in water and observe tropical nature, this river offers plenty of opportunities for both. The river area is, in fact, one of the nicest places in Honduras. A road runs along the river's eastern bank. From the western bank arises the Pico Bonito Mountain, which is covered in dense foliage offering impressive scenery. A few homes, lodges, and restaurants are scattered throughout the rolling hills and along the river's eastern shore. The dirt road is not in the best condition; yet, you are just minutes from La Ceiba and an international airport. In other words, the area offers nature at its best without the isolation of other regions.

Getting There

Take the highway out of La Ceiba going east, which is the same as the road to Trujillo, and cross the Saopin Bridge over the Cangrejal. The Yaruca turn-off is on the right side of the road right after the bridge. Turn right onto the road that runs parallel to the river. Addresses are given according to the number of km from the turn-off.

White Water Rafting

The river's Class III and IV rapids journey through winding mountain canyons along the river valley lush with tropical vegetation, the habitat of such wildlife as parrots and scarlet

macaws. A rafting trip must be coordinated with a local operator (see page 93).

Hiking

Hike up to the **Bejuco Waterfall**, an impressive 250-foot (76-meter) waterfall that crashes down on the rocks below. Stand under the falls and get a massage. Omega Tours offers a guided tour to the Bejuco Falls. There is also a recently inaugurated trail if you decide to go on your own. Check into the park offices at Km 8.8 (5½ miles) along the river and pay the entrance fee of $6. You should dress adequately for this steep hike through the bush. Wear long pants and adequate shoes.

Bike Tours

Omega Tours offers an excellent biking tour of this area. You are driven to the small village of **Urraco**, almost at the top of the mountain range. From Urraco you bike down the mountains through the villages of Toncontín and Yaruca, which gives you a chance to observe local culture first-hand. The tour continues to **La Colorada**, another small village, site of 61 mounds with ancient ruins that have not yet been uncovered. After a picnic lunch and stop at a local store for a quick drink, the tour continues until it arrives back at the Omega Lodge.

Where to Stay near the River

$-$$ **Omega Jungle Lodge**, Cangrejal River Bank, ☎ 440-0334, omegatours@laceiba.com, www.omegatours.hn/start.htm. A small lodge geared for eco-travelers, with cabañas and a guesthouse. Offers 22 beds, four to a room if necessary. All rooms screened. Horseback riding, beach, jungle, and river tours. Accommodations range from dormitory-style to private cabins and a luxury suite nestled in the rainforest with paths meandering throughout the property. All the accommodations are very well maintained and clean. The owner and the friendly staff are nearly always in attendance, which makes this a fun place to stay. Amenities include hammocks throughout the installations, and a natural spring-water pool. The jungle restaurant offers great seafood platters as well as a variety of delicious vegetarian dishes. What I liked most about this lodge is the

free night of accommodations when you pay for the tour – at a very reasonable rate.

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.	
	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	US$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

$$$$ **Las Cascadas Lodge**, www.lascascadaslodge.com, ☎ 964-9688, in the US toll free ☎ 1-877-556-1321 (satellite phone with two-second delay). This small lodge truly provides a rainforest adventure in luxury. You won't find a nicer place for a restful and fun-packed vacation. The lodge is nestled at the foot of a hill that runs alongside the Cangrejal River with its own natural waterfall and pools for swimming and relaxing. Accommodations include individually air-conditioned guest suites with screened porches overlooking the river waterfall. The Master Suite is the best one. It has one queen bed and a single bed, along with amazing views of the tropical rainforest. The Queen Suite has a spectacular view of the river waterfall and lush tropical rainforest. It also has one queen bed and single bed. Both the Master and Queen suites form part of the main lodge but have private entrances. The Bejuco Cabin is a private cabin with one queen bed and two single beds. It includes a beautiful rock bathtub and double outdoor shower. The cabin is just a one-minute walk from the main lodge. Amenities at the lodge include Jacuzzi and barbecue area, full self-service bar and kitchen with private chef and international cuisine, masseuse, satellite phone, Internet and entertainment area, 24-hour security and finished trails, bridges and steps to four nearby swimming holes and waterfalls with platforms. Bicycle, horseback, rafting, kayaking, hiking, and mountain tours are offered.

Finca Papagayo, ken@kenhutz.com. Follow the Yaruca Road for a little over 15 km (9.3 miles) until you reach the village of El Pital. Take a boat ride across the river to the Finca Papagayo. A guest ranch and cocoa plantation along the beautiful Río Cangrejal, the finca's aim is to acquaint you with the local culture and surroundings. They believe a traveler

should have a genuine encounter with the "other," not just an encounter with one's own in a different locale, as too often happens on a cruise or commercial tour. Their main house, dormitories, and private bungalows are all made in the local style, using adobe, tropical hardwoods, and thatched roofs. Most of the food is grown on the land, and dinners are all you can eat for about $5. Enjoy the library, waterfalls, cocoa plantation, and tropical cloud forest.

Cabañas Aventuras del Bosque, Km 12 (7½ miles), ☎ 442-2673. This small hotel offers four basic cabins with private bath, hot water and a restaurant. They will arrange tours for you with local operators.

Where to Eat near the River

$$-$$$ **Expatriates Cangrejal**, Km 8 (five miles) along Río Cangrejal from the bridge on the left side of the road. The second floor open-air restaurant offers views of Pico Bonito Mountain and the river. They are famous for their barbecued ribs, delicious grilled meat platters, as well as hamburgers, cheeseburgers and hotdogs, plus a large selection of veggie dishes, salads and great desserts. Activities include horseback riding and a natural swimming area. Open Friday to Sunday from 11 am to 5 pm. There are two Expatriates, one in the city of La Ceiba and another on the road that runs adjacent to the Cangrejal River, which is east of town. There is no phone at the river location. Transportation available from the Expatriates in town every hour and a half from noon on.

$$-$$$ **Secret River Gardens**, Km 5 (three+ miles) along Río Cangrejal. The restaurant is designed for privacy and enjoyment of the incredible botanical gardens and vistas of the river. There are three dining decks built into the cliffs and four stone patios set into areas close to the river, with one stone patio immediately on the river. Use of steps and paths is required except for the uppermost deck, which is handicap-accessible or for

DINING PRICE CHART	
Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.	
$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

those who don't want to descend to different observation levels. Food is prepared using fresh ingredients on open-air grills. You can actually watch the cooking process from several of the decks. The Garden's specialty is *pinchos* or shish kebob, comprised of chicken, beef, lobster, fish, or shrimp. The famous Honduran rice and beans mix, fruit, salad and plantains accompany the *pinchos*. Vegetarian meals are available upon request. Open from Tuesday to Sunday for lunch.

Río Maria

Plan a day-trip to the Río Maria ecological area, just five miles (eight km) out of La Ceiba. A short hike along the river leads to a series of clear pools ideal for bathing.

Take the bus heading east from the station and ask to be dropped off at the bridge in the Village of Río Maria. Follow the path from the "Ecological Area" sign and in about half an hour, you'll reach the first pool.

Eco-Adventures in National Parks

Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge

Cuero y Salado Wildlife Refuge is 20 miles (32 km) west of La Ceiba. The park was declared a protected area in 1987 to preserve diminishing wildlife and coastal wetlands. Tropical jungle, swamps, rivers, beaches and the ocean cover a large area where the Cuero and Salado rivers merge. In total, 15 river basins originating in the Nombre de Díos mountain range form the wetland system that flows through the park into the sea.

> **Environmental Tidbit:** The Barras Cuero y Salado was the first site in Honduras to be placed on "The Annotated RAMSAR List of Wetlands of International Importance." In 1993, Cuero y Salado was included on the list as RAMSAR site number 619.

Two ecosystems – a tropical rainforest, and a mangrove forest – host exuberant flora and fauna. Wildlife in the area includes

28% of the bird species found in Honduras, howler monkeys, white-faced capuchin monkeys, jaguars, ocelots, giant anteaters, agoutis, iguanas, kinkajous (*micos de noche*), pacas (*tepescuintle*), river and sea turtles, crocodiles, caimans, three-toed sloths, and boa constrictors. The park is also the largest manatee reserve in Central America.

Only 30 people are allowed in the park each day, so you need to arrange your visit in advance with the Cuero y Salado Foundation (FUCSA), which administers the park. Three boat tours are offered within the park, which is open daily from 6 am to 6 pm. Park admission is US$10. FUCSA's office is two blocks west of the Central Plaza in La Ceiba in the Edificio Ferrocarrill Nacional (National Railroad Building). ☎/fax 443-0329, www.cueroysalado.org.

Getting There

Drive west from La Ceiba on CA-13 until you reach La Toronjera, which is about 14 miles (22½ km) outside of town. Turn right and follow the road to La Union.

From the central bus station in La Ceiba, take the direct bus to La Union, which leaves hourly from 6:30 am. You can also take any other bus heading west and ask to get off at La Toronjera, then walk 30 minutes to La Union.

It's five and half miles (nine km) from La Union to the Visitor's Center. You can follow the railway tracks on foot to get there or take the *burra*, a small hand-operated railcar. The trip by *burra* takes an hour and costs about $8 for the first person and $1 for each additional person. You can also arrange the day before for a motorized railcar (*motocarro*) that holds up to 20 people. The *motocarro* charges $10 for the first person and $4 for each additional passenger. Call FUCSA at ☎/fax 443-0329 for more information.

Visitor's Center

The Visitor's Center is open from 6 am to 6 pm. Services are limited and include a small mural exhibit, orientation, and t-shirts for sale. Bring your own food, water, and insect repellent. A guide will be waiting for you at the center. You can choose from three boat tours through the mangroves that

take from two to four hours. The boat tours are the best, as they allow you to move through the area quietly and view more wildlife.

Overnight in the Park

Two bungalows that sleep four people are available for $10 each. Bring food, water, sheets, and insect repellent. You can camp on the beach close to the Visitor's Center for about $1.50.

Pico Bonito National Park

La Ceiba's majestic mountain backdrop is aptly named the "Pico Bonito" or Pretty Peak. One of the highest mountains in the area, at nearly 8,000 feet (2,436 m), this verdant landmark is visible for miles. With its peak usually shrouded in clouds, this mystic mountain is home to such animals as the elusive jaguar and the resplendent quetzal.

Forming part of the Nombre de Díos Mountain Range, Pico Bonito National Park is the third-largest park in Honduras, covering 265,000 acres. Eight ecosystems (four main systems and four transitional systems) have been identified in the park. These include pine forests, lowland broadleaf forests, and cloud forests at higher altitudes, some of which are still primary growth, having never been disturbed by man. Free flowing rivers form 19 watersheds that provide drinking water to surrounding communities and cities, as well as spectacular scenery for the visitor.

WATERSHEDS

"A watershed is an area of land that catches rain and drains into a marsh, stream, river, lake, or groundwater. Watersheds are being threatened by natural events and reckless human intervention. Throughout Latin America, rampant deforestation causes soil erosion, undermining the ability of watersheds to provide water for drinking and for crops. Meanwhile, farmers, loggers, and developers destroy forests for profit. Unless local communities, governments, and concerned individuals take steps

to halt these processes, devastating shortages in water and food supplies will result." – The Ecologic Development Fund. The Ecologic Development Fund is working with the local park foundation to protect and conserve the Pico Bonito watersheds.

Hiking

A hike on the mountain offers a trek through lush forests of mahogany, cedar, oak, and passionflowers – also the habitat for hundreds of rare and ornamental plants such as orchids and bromeliads. Streams, rivers, and dozens of waterfalls add to the magic of your journey. Sheer cliffs provide a challenge for expert mountain climbers, while the most ambitious might decide to try for the peak, which has only been reached by a few expeditions in recent years.

An abundance of wildlife is also found here and a hike with a naturalist guide is your best option to appreciate its diversity. Jaguars, deer, anteaters, hares, squirrels, tapirs, pumas, white-face monkeys, spider monkeys, wild boars, ocelots, genets, and black agoutis reside in the park, as do over 300 species of birds, including toucans, macaws, parrots, woodpeckers, oropendolas, hawk-eagles, motmots, quetzals, ospreys and the beautiful emerald hummingbirds. Many a colorful insect can be found in the area. Keep your eyes open for a jeweled scarab or a blue monarch.

The park is managed by the Pico Bonito National Park Foundation (FUNAPIB), which was established in July 1993 to protect the area. FUNAPIB, Barrio El Alvarado Calle #15, Ave 14 de Julio, ☎/fax 442-0618, Fundación Parque Nacional Pico Bonito, fupnapib@laceiba.com. A trip to the Pico Bonito National Park can be combined with a visit to the Butterfly Farm, and the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.

Tour operators listed for La Ceiba offer one or more day all-inclusive expeditions into the Pico Bonito National Park.

The Lodge at Pico Bonito is now offering a guided lunch tour of their trails, which include bird-watching towers and swimming hole, entrance to the Butterfly Farm and Serpentarium,

plus lunch for about $30. The dinner tour does not include the Butterfly Farm and Serpentarium.

Zacate Falls Trail: These spectacular 130-foot (40-m) waterfalls are probably the most popular destination in the park.

To get there, drive 12 miles (19 km) west from La Ceiba on CA-13. The park entrance is on the left. Drive on the dirt road until you reach the guardhouse, where you pay the $6 entrance fee. From there you take Zacate River trail for a mile and a half until you reach the falls.

If you take the bus, ask to be dropped off at the Zacate Trail. Then walk down the road through the pineapple plantations until you reach the guardhouse.

Getting There

Drive west from La Ceiba to the entrance of the Colonia "1 de Mayo" and follow the dirt road until you reach Armenia Bonito. Alternatively, take a taxi to Armenia Bonito ($7-$10), from where the road leads directly to the park entrance. You must leave your car here. Pay the $6 entrance fee at the ranger's home, which is the last house on the road before the park, and then follow the trail until you reach the Visitor's Center (*Campamento de Curla*).

Or you can take the "1 de Mayo" bus (every hour from 6 am) from the Central Plaza or the Parque Bonilla. The last stop is Armenia Bonito.

From the Visitor's Center, you can choose which hiking trail you would like to take. One trail leads to a lookout and another follows the river to a small dam. For a guided tour, make previous arrangements with FUPNAPIB, ☎/fax 442-0618, fupnapib@laceiba.com.

Overnight in the Park

Visitor's Center, Pico Bonito National Park. You can overnight in the center ($10), which provides mattresses and a grill. Bring your own sheets, food, water, and insect repellent. A nearby river is a nice place to wash up after a day of exploration.

$$$$$ **The Lodge at Pico Bonito**, 12 miles (20 km) from La Ceiba, ☎ 440-0389, www.picobonito.com, picobonito@

caribe.hn; reservations ☎ 888-428-0221 (toll free US/Canada) or 01-312-345-3288 (worldwide). This is a remote and luxurious eco-lodge in the buffer zone of one of the largest national parks and rainforests in Honduras. The lodge has 21 cabins, a gourmet restaurant, bar, conference room, outdoor pool, bilingual staff, expert guides, and a beautiful butterfly sanctuary and nursery. Trails run throughout the 200-acre property and into the adjacent Pico Bonito National Park. You can hike to the observation tower, which provides a superb view of surrounding rainforest. The Tropical Butterfly Farm is also just a short walk away.

$$ **Noa Noa Lodge**, Pico Bonito National Park, ☎/fax 443-0700. This small, family-run hotel offers five rooms with private bath, restaurant, and pool in a fresh, natural mountain environment. Drive from La Ceiba to Colonia Primero de Mayo (on the main road to Tela right after the airport). Follow the dirt road into the mountain until you arrive in a small village called Armenia Bonito. From there follow the main road until you see the Noa Noa Lodge sign at the entrance. The Lodge is not visible from the road. Reservations must be made a week in advance by fax. No smoking.

Amaras Wildlife Rehabilitation Center (AMARAS)

At El Pino, ☎ 443-0329, about 12 miles (20 km) west of La Ceiba on the road to Tela. AMARAS was founded in 1993 by a local non-profit organization with funding from the United States Humane Society and is now managed by FUNAPIB. The main purpose of this center is to rehabilitate and release wild animals confiscated from the illegal animal trade. You will learn about the illegal pet trade, the rehabilitation process, and see many species of birds and mammals in the process of rehabilitation, including macaws, monkeys, sloths, and sometimes even baby jaguars. The Center also provides environmental education to local rural schools.

The Center is on a 150-acre farm, which boasts plantations with over a dozen species of tropical hardwoods, as well as black pepper, citrus and passion fruit, among others. The plantations are part of a for-profit operation to support refor-

estation efforts and create seed banks. You can hike, bike, and horseback ride on the roads throughout the plantations.

Amaras is on the left side of the highway as you travel west from La Ceiba toward Tela near the village of El Pino. You can either drive there or take any bus heading west.

Tropical Butterfly Farm, Gardens & Serpentarium

At ☎ 443-2716, http://hondurasbutterfly-farm.tripod.com, rgallardo32@hotmail.com, this is on the edge of the Pico Bonito National Park and near the Pico Bonito Lodge. Hundreds of different species of butterflies can be seen. You will learn about butterfly habits and can even watch them being born. Open Wednesday to Sunday from 8 am to 4:30 pm.

Beaches

As a port city, La Ceiba also offers plenty of opportunities for a relaxing day at the beach.

While swimming in the ocean in or near the city is not recommendable, La Ceiba does possess beautiful beaches very close by.

Playa de Peru

Playa de Peru, just east of the city, is easily accessible and offers white sand beaches graced with swaying coconut palms to hang your hammock from or stretch your towel under. Snack bar and picnic tables are also available. On the weekends, vendors often sell various types of Honduran fast food, such as fried chicken, enchiladas, and tacos. Take any bus heading east at the central station or on the La Ceiba-Trujillo highway and ask to be dropped off at Río Maria Bridge. Follow the dirt road on the left, or northern, side of the road. It's about a 15-minute walk to the beach. You can also take a shared taxi from 4-5 Ave 6 Calle, behind the national phone company, Hondutel.

Sambo Creek

Enjoy a day of Garífuna culture in this Garífuna village, along a beautiful white sand beach. Make a day-trip to the villages or spend one or more nights.

Sambo Creek and Corozal are about 12 miles (20 km) from La Ceiba. You can catch a route taxi in the Barrio Potreritos, 4/5 Ave 6 C. If you're driving, take the road to Jutiapa until reaching the Corozal turn-off. About three miles (five km) down the dirt road is the turn-off to Sambo Creek. Shared taxis, found at 4/5 Ave 6 Calle, depart every half-hour to both Corozal and Sambo Creek.

Glenda's Paradise Thermal Springs are in a natural setting near thermal waters that flow into the clear river for swimming. Admission $8 for adults and $4 for children.

Where to Stay

Hotel Hermanos Avila, Sambo Creek, has basic accommodations with fan or a/c, some with private bath

$ **Helen's**, Sambo Creek, ☎ 440-2303, www.dive.to/honduras, honduras@dive.to. 11 suites, which are two- or three-bedroom cabañas with kitchen, private bath, hot water, a/c, and fan. Ideal for a beach vacation, the cabañas are set in a nice garden and are well-maintained, well-furnished, and clean. Available on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis. Other amenities include pool, beachfront, bar and a restaurant specializing in seafood.

$$ **Hotel Canadien**, next to Sambo Creek Garífuna village, 15 miles (24 km) east of La Ceiba, ☎ 440-2099, www.hotelcanadien.com. This nicely done hotel is in a white three-story L-shaped building with a roof-top terrace, a large oval pool with comfortable lounge chairs, and a beautiful garden right on the beach offering miles of white sand beaches in either direction. The hotel exudes a comfortable, tropical ambience, and is clean, quiet, affordable, and perfectly located. Accommodations include 22 suites with living room and separate bedroom with private bath, hot water, a queen-size bed or two single beds, a mini-bar, a/c, fans, cable TV and an ocean view. The hotel has a pool, bar, and restaurant. Activities include mountain hikes, boat excursions,

snorkeling, fishing, rafting. Free shuttle service (12 people maximum) to and from La Ceiba Airport if you fax the airline arrival time to them in advance.

Where to Eat

$$-$$$ **Helen's**, next door to Hotel Canadien. This beachfront favorite offers international and typical seafood platters, and a full-service bar.

$$-$$$ **La Champa**. Another beachfront restaurant that has an international menu with Italian specialties and seafood as well as full bar service. They have movies and live entertainment, such as local Garífuna bands and Punta dancers. Boat trips to the Cayos Cochinos also offered. Open daily 9 am to 12 pm and on Tuesday 9 am to 8 pm.

$$ **El Mirador**, Hotel Canadien, Sambo Creek. This indoor/outdoor restaurant has an international menu with seafood specials and full-service bar.

$-$$ **Sambo Creek Restaurant**. This beachfront restaurant is near La Champa and offers well-prepared, typical seafood platters at reasonable prices.

Corozal

Where to Stay

$$-$$$ **Villa Rhina Club and Mountain Resort**, Corozal, www.honduras.com/villarhina, villarhina@honduras.com, ☎ 443-1434, 443-4122, fax/☎ 443-3558. Accommodations include 13 rooms with either ocean or mountain view, a/c, ceiling fan, private bath with hot water, small refrigerator, TV, and room service from 7 am to 9 pm. Group rates for 15-20 people. This lovely hotel set in natural environs is just a 10-minute walk from the beach. Amenities include swimming in one of three natural pools with small waterfalls, or hiking to nearby mountains. Sports enthusiast can enjoy a match at the volleyball court or the soccer field. The restaurant offers international cuisine, exotic cocktails, and even lunch on the beach. Transport to and from the airport.

Where to Eat

Brisas Del Mar. Beachfront restaurant, which offers typical platters and seafood as well as full-bar service.

Adventures in the Water

Water Jungle Aqua Park, at the Palma Real Hotel, ☎ 429-0500, 12 miles (20 km) from the city of La Ceiba on the highway to Trujillo. This park offers a large aqua park with waterslides, wave pool, and games for small children, as well as a large food court. Open from Friday to Sunday 9 am to 5 pm. Admission is $10 per person for two consecutive days.

On the highway to Trujillo about 15 miles (24 km) east of La Ceiba, **Cacao Lagoon** offers isolated beaches, indigenous culture and an abundance of wildlife, which includes an array of bird species and white-faced and howler monkeys. There is exceptional kayaking or canoeing here through the mangroves that grow in and around the lagoon, which is separated from the ocean by a sand bank. Cacao and sugar cane fields that are cultivated by residents of the nearby village are also seen in the outlying area. On a clear day you can see the Cayos Cochinos islands, which are approximately 10 miles (16 km) straight out from the beach near the lagoon. A guided tour to this area is highly recommended. Tours cost about $40 per person and run the entire day. You'll definitely appreciate a guide's explanation of the plant and animal life.

BUTTERFLIES

Butterfly & Insect Museum, Colonia El Sauce, Segunda Etapa, #G-12, ☎ 442-2874. The museum has over 12,000 butterflies, moths and other insects from Honduras and around the world on display. Discover interesting facts and learn how to collect and display these beautiful, bizarre creatures. Admire the pictures and watch videos of butterflies and other insects in the tropical rainforest. Open from Monday to Saturday 8 am to noon and 1-5 pm. Admission is about $2 for adults and $1 for children.

Where to Stay in La Ceiba

All-Inclusive

$$$ **Palma Real Hotel**, ☎ 429-0500, 12 miles (20 km) from the city of La Ceiba on the highway to Trujillo. This beachfront resort offers 161 rooms and suites in a two-building complex. Rooms include private bath with hot water, a/c, telephone, cable TV. Amenities include the **Caña Brava Restaurant**, which offers buffet-style meals with theme menus on the weekends; Ola Hola Theater, with live entertainment; the Guifitti Disco, right in front of the pools and open from Thursday to Sunday 10 pm to 1 am; and the Water Jungle Aqua Park. Group discounts available.

Expensive

$$$ **La Quinta Hotel**, on the Ceiba-Trujillo road in front of D'Antoni Golf Club, Colonia el Sauce (273 yards/250 m) east of Megaplaza Mall, ☎ 443-3194. This centrally located hotel offers 113 rooms and mini-suites with private bath, hot water, phone, a/c, and cable TV. The hotel's **Maxims Restaurant** serves local and international fare, buffet menu for groups as well as room service. Breakfast from 6 am and a Sunday breakfast buffet. Amenities include one adult pool, one children's pool and a poolside mini-bar offers snacks and drinks. Also here is Evelyn's Beauty Salon, the Maya Souvenir Shop, Maya Rent a Car, a conference room, and a Piano Bar.

Moderate

$ **Coco Pando Resort Hotel**, www.cocopando.com, info@CocoPando.com; in US or Canada toll free ☎ 866-463-6959 or 239-463-6959 (ask for Charlie Meador) or in Honduras 969-9663 (ask for Ron Shepard). This hotel is west of town and on the beach. Rooms with private bath, hot water, floor and ceiling

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.	
	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	US$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

fans, cable TV, a/c, and Internet access. The **Iguana Bar & Restaurant** features a full bar and menu, including local seafood and meat specialty dishes. Also features beach barbecue, tables and chairs, beach lounges, hammocks, and private guest deck area. Rates include pick-up and drop-off in La Ceiba at Golosón International Airport, local bus stations or the Ferry Dock. Laundry service is available close-by at additional cost.

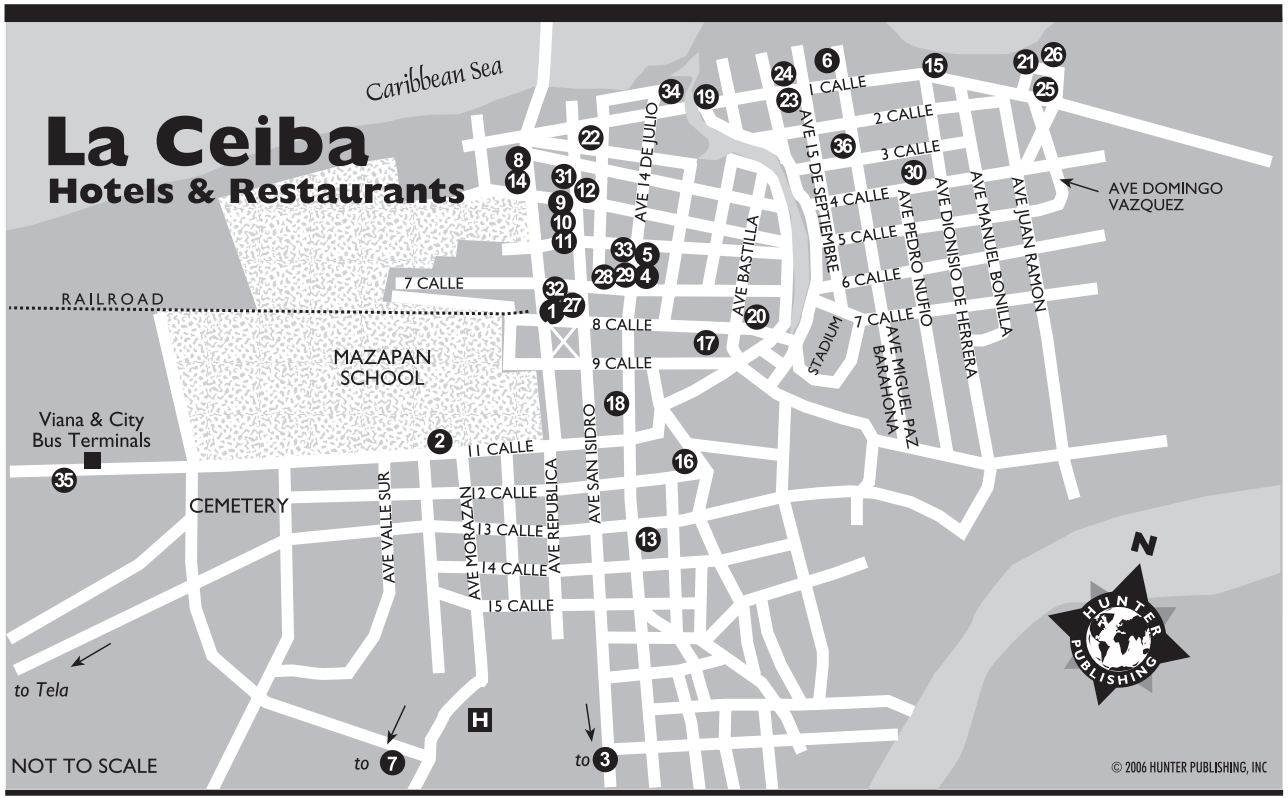
$ **Gran Hotel Ceiba**, Ave San Isidro and 5 Calle E. Tall building three blocks from the beach. ☎ 443-2747. The Gran Hotel Ceiba has 41 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, safe deposit boxes, and cable TV. Ample parking, conference room, laundry service, sauna and gym facility, new Internet café with fax services. A restaurant, bar and cafeteria serve international and national cuisine and provide room service.

$ **Gran Hotel Paris**, Central Plaza, ☎ 443-2391, www.granhotelparis.com, hotelparis@psinet.hn The Hotel Paris offers 59 rooms, four suites with private bath, hot water, a/c, phone, and cable TV. Amenities include a pool, an air-conditioned restaurant that offers local and international platters, bar, Internet cyber café, fast food, travel agency, banking facilities, and a conference room. This recently refurbished hotel has long been a local favorite.

$$ **Hotel Italia Ave**, 6 and 7 Calle, Ave 14 de Julio, next to the Hotel Colonial, ☎ 443-0150, www.hotelitaliahn.com. Accommodations include 68 large and airy rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Amenities include pool, hotel restaurant and bar on premises. This is a good choice.

$$ **Hotel Partenon Beach**, Barrio La Barra, La Barra Street, ☎ 443-0404. On the beach, this hotel has 110 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Rooms in the new wing are larger than those in the old wing and have a small balcony, but are more expensive. Amenities include swimming pool, conference room, sauna/gym facilities, bar and restaurant.

$$ **Hotel VIP Siesta**, 15 de Septiembre Blvd, next to Central Bank, two blocks from Central Plaza, ☎ 443-0968, aponce@psinet.hn. A bed and breakfast offering 22 rooms


La Ceiba
Hotels & Restaurants
Caribbean Sea
RAILROAD
7 CALLE
8 CALLE
9 CALLE
MAZAPAN SCHOOL
Viana & City Bus Terminals
CEMETERY
11 CALLE
12 CALLE
13 CALLE
14 CALLE
15 CALLE
AVE VALLE SUR
AVE MORAZAN
AVE REPUBLICA
AVE SAN ISIDRO
AVE 14 DE JULIO
AVE BASTILLA
1 CALLE
2 CALLE
3 CALLE
4 CALLE
5 CALLE
6 CALLE
7 CALLE
AVE 15 DE SEPTIEMBRE
AVE PEDRO NUFIO
AVE DIONISIO DE HERRERA
AVE MANUEL BONILLA
AVE JUAN RAMON
AVE DOMINGO VAZQUEZ
STADIUM
AVE MIGUEL PAZ BARAHONA
to Tela
to 7
to 3
NOT TO SCALE
N
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1. Gran Hotel Paris/Le Petit Café
2. Hotel Siesta VIP
3. Hotel La Quinta
4. Hotel Colonial/El Portal Restaurant
5. Hotel Italia
6. Hotel Rotterdam/Hotel Amsterdam
7. Hotel Emperador
8. Hotel Mar Azul
9. Gran Hotel Ceiba
10. Hotel Iberia and restaurant
11. Hotel San Carlos/Coffee Shop
12. Hotel Caribe
13. Posada de Don Giuseppe/Café Giarre
14. Hotel Conquistador
15. Hotel Partenon
16. Expatriate's Bar & Grill
17. La Plancha Steak House
18. Ricardo's
19. El Gourmet Bar & Grill
20. Bay Islands Restaurant
21. Las Brisas de Naturaleza
22. Le Rustique
23. Mango Tango Restaurant & Sports Bar
24. Méson del Puerto
25. Restaurante Chabelite
26. Seaview
27. The Palm Bar & Grill
28. Café Cobel
29. Cafeteria Shalom
30. Garífuna Restaurant
31. Cric Cric Burger
32. Masapán Cafeteria
33. Paty's Juices
34. Pupusería Universitaria
35. El Patio Restaurant
36. Dan's Hotel

with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Hotel restaurant.

$$ **Posada de Don Giuseppe**, corner of Ave San Isidro and Calle 13, ☎ 440-2022. Accommodations include 10 rooms, private bath with hot water, a/c, fan, and cable TV. Bar and restaurant.

Budget

Dan's Hotel, Calle 3, Barrio La Isla, ☎/fax 443-4219. Accommodations include 11 rooms, private bath, hot water, a/c, fan, cable, and TV. Family-run hotel, the owners cook meals upon request.

Hotel Casa Dorada, just 500 yards (457 m) from Megaplaza Mall and five minutes from Central Plaza, ☎ 443-3366. The Casa Dorada accommodations include 18 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c or fan and cable TV. The hotel's restaurant/bar features seafood and international cuisine.

Hotel Caribe, San Isidro and Atlántida Ave, 5 Calle, ☎ 443-1857. Accommodations include 18 spacious and very clean rooms with private bath, some with a/c and cable TV.

Hotel Colonial, Ave 14 de Julio, 6/7 Calle, ☎ 443-1953. This comfortable downtown hotel features Colonial-style décor with tile floors, wood furniture, doors, and wrought iron details. Accommodations include 50 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. This hotel has a good restaurant featuring Thai cuisine, as well as a bar and conference room.

Hotel Emperador, Colonia Toronjal on the right side of the road east out of the city, in front of the Shell Gas Station and 110 yards (100 m) from the Megaplaza Mall, ☎ 443-1932. The Emperador offers 55 rooms with private bath, a/c, and cable TV. Amenities include rooftop pool, restaurant, and bar.

Hotel Iberia, 5-6 Calle, Ave San Isidro, 273 yards (250 m) from Central Plaza, next door to Hotel Ceiba, ☎ 443-0115. The Iberia offers 44 rooms with private bath, hot water, two double beds, a/c, phone, cable TV, room service, and same-day laundry service. The hotel also has a restaurant, business center, travel agency, and beauty salon.

Hotel Mar Azul, Ave La Republican, between 2 Calle and 5 Calle, five minutes north of The centRal plaza, ☎ 440-1078,

hotelmarazul@caribe.hn. Accommodations include 27 rooms with private bath, a/c, fan, and cable TV.

Hotel Rotterdam, 1 Calle, Ave Barahona, Barrio La Isla, ☎ 443-0321. Eight very basic rooms with private bath and fan. This popular backpacker hotel is in the Zona Viva just half a block from the beach. The office of Jungle River Rafting is in hotel.

Hotel Amsterdam 2001, Ave Barahona 1 Calle, Barrio La Isla, ☎ 443-2311. This small hotel is another backpacker favorite right in the Zona Viva just half a block from the beach. There are five rooms with private bath and fan.

Hotel Conquistador, Ave La República and 5 Calle, ☎ 443-2851. Accommodations include 23 rooms with private bath, a/c, fan, cable TV, and views of the city. The **Conquistador Cafeteria** specializes in Honduran-style meals.

Hotel San Carlos, Ave San Isidro, 5-6 Calle, ☎ 443-0330. They have basic and clean rooms with ceiling fans. The hotel's coffee shop is a favorite with locals and travelers.

Where to Eat in La Ceiba

Fine Dining

$-$$-$$$ **Expatriate's Bar and Grill**, Barrio El Imán, at the end of 12th Street, ☎ 443-2272, www.honduras.com/expatriates, expats@honduras.com. This restaurant caters to expats in separate restaurant and bar sections. Famous for their barbecued ribs, delicious grilled meat platters, as well as hamburgers, cheeseburgers and hotdogs, and a large selection of veggie dishes and salads. Save some room for the great homemade desserts and fresh-brewed coffee. Full-service bar. Open Thursday to Monday from 4 pm to midnight. Sundays from 11 am to midnight during NFL season from September to January.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.	
$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

$$-$$$ **La Plancha Steak House**, Barrio Imán, 9 Calle, behind Esso gas station. Air-conditioned steak house featuring grilled platters. Full-bar service. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

$$$ **Ricardo's**, Ave 14 de Julio, 10 Calle, from the southwest corner of the park, one block west and one block south, ☎ 443-0468, 440-1443. Voted many times the best restaurant in Central America, this spot is famous for its meat platters, but serves great seafood, chicken, pasta, and soups. It also features a complete salad bar and homemade desserts. Enjoy your meal on their covered patio or inside with air conditioning. Open Monday-Saturday, from 11 am to 1:30 pm and 5:30 pm to 10. No jeans or sandals.

Moderate

$$ **Café Giarre**, Ave San Isidro, 13 Calle, corner of the Don Giuseppe's Hotel. This is a European-style sidewalk café, with indoor air-conditioning, offering a wide selection of coffees, snacks, and cocktails. Open from 1 pm to 11, closed Tuesdays.

$$ **Él Guapo's Bar & Grill**, Ave 14 de Julio, 14 C. Indoor/outdoor bar and restaurant with varied menu. Open Wednesday to Friday 4 pm-12 am, Saturday 11:30 am to 12 am, and Sunday 11:30 am to 10 pm.

$$ **El Gourmet Bar & Grill**, Zona Viva by the bridge. This indoor/outdoor waterfront steak and seafood house with a large sports bar serves excellent food ranging from snacks and sandwiches to complete entrées. The bar has six TV screens and offers great exotic cocktails made with fresh fruit juices. Open daily 11 am to midnight. Happy hour 2-6 pm daily.

$-$$$ **Applebee's**, Megaplaza Mall. Open daily from 11 am to 10 pm+. Full-bar service. TV screens for sporting events.

$$ **Bay Islands Restaurant**, Barrio Potreritos, across from the Veterinarian Hospital. This seafood restaurant features Bay Island cooking as well as chicken and meat platters. Open Monday to Saturday from 11 am to 2:30 pm, and from 5:30 to 10.

$-$$ **El Patio**, Ave 15 de Septiembre, close to La Ceiba's bus terminal. Very good typical Honduran food and great appetizers served with drinks. Full-bar service. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

$-$$ **Las Brisas de Naturaleza**, Barrio La Barra. This beachfront restaurant serves typical Honduran fare as well as good seafood.

$$ **Le Rustique**, Ave San Isidro, ☎ 963-8653. This rooftop restaurant offers beef, chicken, pork, and seafood prepared the French Way! They also make a mean Quiche Lorraine, which you can enjoy with a fresh fruit drink. Full-service bar. Open Tuesday to Saturday from 5:30 pm to midnight.

$$ **Mango Tango Restaurant and Sports Bar**, Zona Viva. This restaurant has good Honduran-style food, including seafood platters. The full-service Sports Bar is very popular with locals, showing major sports events. Open from Wednesday to Sunday from 5 pm to after midnight.

$$ **Mesón del Puerto**, Barrio La Isla, 1 C. This is another favorite beachfront restaurant offering open-air deck as well as air-conditioned dining. It has excellent international and local cuisine, good service, full bar, and a good wine selection. Open daily for lunch and dinner, Tuesday through Sunday.

$-$$ **Palace Restaurant**, Ave 14 de Julio, 8 Calle, ☎ 443 0685. This cool air-conditioned spot features a large menu of Chinese food as well as meat, pork, and chicken platters.

$-$$ **Restaurante Chabelita**, Barrio La Barra, offers typical Honduran and seafood platters and is open daily from 10 am to 10 pm.

$-$$ **Seaview**, Barrio La Barra. A beachfront restaurant with a dance floor and an international menu featuring seafood.

$$ **The Palm Bar & Grill**, half a block from Hotel Paris. Air-conditioned bar and restaurant owned by a US expat. They serve local and international cuisine, seafood, and steaks. Cable TV (CNN and sports only). Open daily 8 am to 1 am.

Budget

$ **Hotel San Carlos**, 5 y 6 Calle, Ave San Isidro. The hotel's coffee shop is a favorite with locals and travelers.

$ **Autopollos Al Carbon**, La Ceiba-Tela highway. Open 24 hours. This drive-through restaurant, which also has indoor seating, serves rotisserie chicken and side dishes such as coleslaw and French fries.

$ **Burger King** has two locations, one next to Hotel La Quinta and another downtown near La Ceiba's Central Plaza.

$ **Café Cobel**, between Atlántida and 14 de Julio Avenues, 7 Calle, #129. This popular downtown café serves large portions of good local fare such as *baleadas* (refried beans in a folded flour tortilla) and beef soup, as well as fresh fruit drinks and desserts. Open Monday to Saturday 6 am to 6:30 pm.

$ **Cafeteria Shalom**, 7 Calle, Central Plaza. Israeli-owned café serves delicious Middle Eastern food including falafel, kibbi, zambusi, stuffed peppers, and an excellent lunch buffet special. Open daily 7 am to 8 pm.

$ **Centro Cultural Satuye/Garífuna Restaurant**, Barrio La Isla, Herrera Ave 4 Calle, This ethnic restaurant offers traditional Garífuna food, including good seafood platters. Live music in the evenings.

$ **Cric Cric Burger** has two locations, one on Ave 14 de Julio 3 Calle, and another on 1 Calle in front of La Aduana Park. The menu includes hamburgers, steak, submarine sandwiches, snacks, as well as chicken and rib dishes accompanied by soft drinks or beer.

$ **El Taquito Mejicano**, Calle La Barca, Barrio Potreritos. This outdoor restaurant offers typical Mexican fare.

$ **La Casa**, between San Isidro and 14 de Julio Avenues, 9 C. Downtown cafeteria with tables set around an open-air patio, serves fast food buffet as well as local and international food platters.

$ **Masapán**, between Ave La República and Ave San Isidro, 7 Calle, next door to the Cafeteria Cobel on the second floor. This eatery offers self-service, buffet-style food that includes a filling breakfast, good pastries, and fresh bread. Now open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

$ **Paty's Juices**, Ave 14 de Julio 6-7 Calle. Fresh fruit juices and fruit salads.

$ **Pupusería Universitaria**, Zona Viva at the intersection of Ave 14 de Julio and 1 Calle, next door to the Hotel Flamingo. This budget restaurant serves inexpensive fare. including *pupusas*, tacos, and beer. Open daily from 10 am to 11:30 pm.

Hotel Restaurants

$$$$ **Itzama**, Lodge at Pico Bonito. Reservations required for non-guests; open Wednesday to Sunday for lunch from 11 am to 3 pm, and for dinner from 6 pm to 10 pm. This full-service restaurant has excellent food and moderately priced wines. The lodge is now offering lunch and dinner tours. See *Hiking,* page 101.

$$ **El Portal**, Hotel El Colonial, 6-7 Calle, Ave 14 de Julio. Air-conditioned restaurant offering local as well as international fare, mainly Thai food.

$-$$ **Hotel Iberia**, 5-6 Calle, Ave San Isidro. This hotel restaurant/bar serves local and international platters, buffets, and Spanish wines.

$-$$ **Iguana Bar and Restaurant**, Coco Pando. It features a full bar and menu, including local seafood and meat specialty dishes. This is a fun place to spend an afternoon at the beach.

$-$$ **Le Petit Café**, Hotel Paris, Ave San Isidro, offers typical Honduran food.

$$ **Iberia**, Ave San Isidro, 5-6 Calle. The hotel restaurant and bar serves local and international platters, buffets, Spanish wines, and room service.

Nightlife

Long renowned as a party town, La Ceiba's "**Zona Viva**" is on 1 Calle, which runs beside the coast. Bars and restaurants literally line the streets and you should have no problem finding something open until the wee hours of the morning.

■ Trujillo

Trujillo is the end of the line folks. Although the north coast of Honduras does stretch farther east into La Moskitia, traveling beyond Trujillo gets complicated. Nestled between the Calentura Mountains and Trujillo Bay, this remote town is surrounded by virgin tropical nature. Seldom-visited rivers,

lagoons, mountains, and beautiful beaches wait quietly to be explored.

Although it's a small city, cultural experiences are plentiful. A rich Spanish Colonial history also provides for lessons in conquest and piracy. During the last week of June, Trujillo celebrates an annual festival. Different blocks around town host parties each night, which mainly consist of cheap beer and street dancing, culminating in a huge party with live bands on the last night.

History

Evidence of human residence in the area around Trujillo dates back to 1200-600 BC, based on pottery found in the Cuyamel Caves on the slopes of the Calentura Mountain just behind the present city.

Trujillo is the capital of the Department or State of Colon. Colon is Spanish for Columbus. Columbus anchored in Puerto Castillo, then Punta Caxinas on August 14, 1502, on his fourth and last voyage to the New World. This was his first landing on the American mainland and a mass was held in honor of the event. Trujillo Bay is one of the deepest bays in Central America, and these are the deep waters Columbus was referring to upon his departure when he said, "Thank God that we got out of these depths."

The city of Trujillo was founded in 1524 by **Francisco de Las Casas**, who was sent by Conquistador Hernán Cortez to put down a takeover by his subordinate Cristobal de Olid in Triunfo de la Cruz, near Tela. Olid had been sent to Honduras to establish the Spanish colony, but had decided to set up an autonomous state with himself as leader instead. After Olid was defeated, the colony was moved from Triunfo de la Cruz to Trujillo. Cortez eventually visited the area and managed to dominate surrounding native villages, mainly Tolupán and Pech, thus creating a Spanish stronghold in Trujillo, which served as the capital of Honduras until it was moved to Comayagua in 1537. The capital was again moved in 1880 to Tegucigalpa, where it remains.

In 1545, Cristobal Pedraza established the first bishopric in Trujillo; it was moved to Comayagua in 1561.

Trujillo's strategic location and deep bay made it a perfect port for shipping gold and silver the Spanish began to mine in the interior of Honduras. It lured many a pirate to its shores, including the infamous Henry Morgan. Built sometime between 1550 and 1600, even the Santa Bárbara Fort was not strong enough to protect the city. As the Bay Islands were the pirate haven of the times, Trujillo suffered endlessly. The Spanish abandoned the colony in 1643 after repeated attacks and being burned to the ground twice. A visit to Trujillo would be incomplete without a visit to the ruins of the **Santa Bárbara Fort**, complete with canons facing the sea and a magnificent view of the bay. Listen for the whispers of the ghosts who fought the buccaneers in search of easy prey.

In 1787, the ever-greedy Spanish once again set up base in Trujillo with the purpose of attacking English trading posts in La Moskitia and the Bay Islands. Pirate attacks continued on the town, the most famous taking place in 1869, by the North American filibuster, William Walker. Walker, in his attempt to take over Central America, had attacked and gained control of Nicaragua, where he was president for a short time. However, when he landed in Trujillo, the British captured him and handed him over to the Honduran authorities. Subsequently tried and executed, Walker was buried in the public cemetery in Trujillo. You can still visit his grave (see page 124).

Getting There

By Plane

There is a small runway in Trujillo but no airport installations. Only small planes land here, usually en route to or from La Moskitia out of La Ceiba. Flights to Trujillo are not normally scheduled. Call **Isleña Airlines** in La Ceiba for flight information, ☎ 443-0179.

By Car

Follow the road east out of La Ceiba. After about an hour and a half you'll reach Saba, where you must turn left. If you turn right, you'll end up in

NOT TO SCALE

PLACES TO STAY & EAT

1. Villas Brinkley
2. Hotel Colonial
3. Hotel Emperador
4. Hotel Mar de Plata
5. Hotel O'Glynn
6. Hotel Trujillo
7. Beach eateries
8. Chrisopher Columbus Hotel, Bahia Bar & Restaurant, Gringo's Bar & Restaurant, Hotel La Quinta
9. Cocopando Hotel, Gari Arte Souveniours

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Olanchito. Continue north for about an hour. Eventually, a well-marked left turn will lead you west along the road that follows the southern bay shore into town. If you continue straight on the eastern shore you will shortly arrive in Puerto Castillo (a large port/small town) and the end of the road. The open end of Trujillo Bay is west. You'll drive by the airstrip on the right, which is easily recognizable by the mammoth green hotel on the far side of it on the beach. Shortly after the airstrip on the left is the bus station, after which you go over the Río Negro Bridge and continue up the hill into town and the Central Plaza.

By Bus

From the bus terminal in La Ceiba take the Trujillo bus, which is **Cotuc**, ☎ 441-2199. From San Pedro Sula, take **Cotuc**, ☎ 557-3175, or any bus going to La Ceiba; from there you can catch the next bus to Trujillo. The last one leaves at 3:30 pm.

From San Pedro Sula (six hours), Cotraibal, 1 Ave SO, 7-8 Calle, ☎ 552-8740, offers express buses at 7:30 am, 9, 11, 1 pm and 3.

Getting Around

Trujillo is a small town and, if you enjoy a nice walk, you can get almost anywhere on foot. A bank, shops, and the church surround the Central Plaza. More businesses and services are just a few blocks south toward the mountain. The street that descends north from the park intersects with a sandy road that runs parallel to the ocean. Turn right onto the *Las Champas* strip, a row of small beach eateries and bars, offering a variety of choices, mostly specializing in seafood. Turn left or west and the road runs through Barrio Cristales, the Garífuna community. It then continues out of town toward Santa Fé. The main road down the eastern side of the hill and out of town will soon take you to the bus station and the airport beach area.

If you want a quick ride, shared route taxis are usually parked on the east side of The centRal plaza. You have to wait until they are full, but you can get just about anywhere for 30¢. Buses to Puerto Castilla, Tocoa, and Santa Fé depart

about every two hours from the central bus terminal near the airstrip and the Texaco station.

Practicalities

Banking

Banco de Occidente, one block south of the park, offers Western Union services and Visa and MasterCard cash advances. Open weekdays from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm and Saturday from 8:30 to noon.

Banco Atlántida, Central Plaza, offers Visa cash advances and cashes traveler's checks. Open weekdays 9 am to 4 pm and Saturday 8:30-11:30 am.

Medical Facilities

There is one public hospital, ☎ 434-4093, east of the park on the hill. Open 24 hours. A pharmacy is in front of the hospital.

Internet

Ecotours Honduras, Barrio El Centro, next to Casa Cural (Parish House), ☎ 434-3173, 434-3117, has the best computers and the fastest connection.

Compu-Pro, one block south from the Central Plaza and next to the bus station, is open from Monday to Saturday 8 am to 8 pm.

Trujillo Online, one block off Hondutel, is open from Monday to Saturday 8 am to noon and 1:30-5:30 pm.

Government Services

The **police station**, on the west side of The centRal plaza, ☎ 434-4038, is open 24 hours. The **phone company (Hondutel)** is one block behind the church in front of The centRal plaza and is open daily 7 am to 9 pm. The **post office** next to the phone company is open weekdays 8 am to noon and Saturday 8-11 am.

Tour Operators

Fucagua (Fundación Del Parque Nacional de Capiro y Calentura y de la Laguna de Guaimoreto), Central Plaza Plaza, Public Library, second floor, ☎ 434-4294. Fucagua provides basic information and guided tours into the national

parks, as well as historical tours of Trujillo for about $5 per person. Forest rangers double as tour guides. They also can provide boat tours. Even if you decide not to take a guided tour, you must pay entrance fees at the Fucagua offices in town. Using their services is a good way to contribute to the area's preservation.

Tropical Tours, Barrio El Centro, next to Casa Cural (Parish House), ☎ 434-3173, 434-3117, is highly recommended and offers tours to the Guaimoreto Lagoon, the Capiro and Calentura National Park and the Cuyamel Caves, as well as La Moskitia. Contact Sammy Fonseca.

Adventures in National Parks

Guaimoreto Lagoon National Park

A short distance east of Trujillo lies the Guaimoreto Lagoon. The lagoon is surrounded by a complex system of waterways and wetlands that host a large number of birds, both native and migratory. Crocodiles, turtles, iguanas, and white-faced monkeys also inhabit the area. To visit the lagoon, arrange a guided boat tour through Fucagua the previous day.

Capiro & Calentura National Park

On the slopes of the Calentura Mountain above Trujillo, this national park is another wonderful example of the tropical exuberance found in Honduras. On the Calentura mountainside, broadleaf rainforest is home to macaws, howler monkeys, and elusive jaguars. As you climb to the top (three hours) at 4,000 feet (1,220 m), the vegetation changes to cloud forest. On a clear day, the Bay Islands are visible to the north and the Agúan Valley to the south. Several paths lead off the road that runs past Villas Brinkley, but hiring a guide is recommendable and it's better to hike during the cooler morning hours.

The **Cuyamel Caves** are in the southwest section of the Capiro-Calentura Park on a small hill and surrounded by tropical forest, which hosts an abundance of wildlife. There are several small knolls in the area that are possibly covered ruins.

Sightseeing

In Town

Santa Bárbara Fort, next to The centRal plaza. This recently renovated 400-year-old fort now includes a museum with cultural and historical exhibits. Originally built to ward off pirates, the fort is perched atop the hill with a wonderful view of the bay. Admission is about $5. Open daily from 8 am to noon and 1-4 pm.

Rufino Galán Archaeological Museum and **swimming** pools. The best way to get to the museum is to take a shared taxi and asked to be dropped off just a block away. This private museum hosts a large and interesting assortment of items ranging from Maya stone carvings to old appliances. Most notable are the remnants of a C-130 Hercules aircraft in which several US soldiers died when it crashed. Behind the museum are several swimming pools of river water for a refreshing dip. The museum is open daily from 8 am to 5:30 pm and the swimming pools on Saturday and Sunday. Admission is $3, including pools.

William Walker's Tomb. Observe the grave of the infamous US filibuster in the municipal cemetery. Walker unsuccessfully attempted to take over Central America. He was captured in Honduras after he escaped from Nicaragua, where he even served as President for a while. The cemetery is five blocks behind the central plaza (toward the mountain).

Out of Town

Barrio Cristales: Follow the road down from the park and head west at the bottom. After just a couple of blocks, you enter the Garífuna village of Cristales, where you can enjoy a delicious meal and visit the Gariarte souvenir shop. Several discos liven up this barrio at night.

The Crocodile Reserve, at Hacienda Tumbador, is on the main highway, but is hard to find because the roads are not marked. The best option is take a tour, unless you've rented a car. Two enormous tractor tires half-buried in the ground mark the entrance on the east side of the highway.

Adventures on Water

The area behind the airstrip east of town is the nicest beach area in Trujillo and only a 10- to 15-minute walk from Central Plaza. You can take a taxi here. This is where the Christopher Columbus Hotel is located, as are the Bahía Bar and Gringo's Bar and Restaurant. All maintain their beaches well. The latter offer good options for a day of beach fun, with shaded palapas, hammocks, food, drink, showers, and bathrooms.

White Cay Reserve (Cayo Blanco). This cay, which is supposedly sinking, is surrounded by a spectacular shallow reef and is a good place for a day of snorkeling and fun in the sun. Arrange a boat tour at the Fucagua office.

Santa Fé, a small Garífuna community, is nine miles from Trujillo. This idyllic village offers beautiful river swimming holes and pristine white sand beaches. Three buses a day travel to Santa Fé from the bus terminal in Trujillo (20 minutes). A visit to Santa Fé is worth the trip if only to try the delicious seafood at the **Caballero Restaurant**. Pete, a former cruise ship chef, puts together some of the best meals on the north coast. You can stay in Santa Fé at **Hotel Orquídeas**, which offers airy and clean rooms with private bath and fan for about $6 per person per night.

Casa Kiwi, on the eastern shore of town, is a good place to spend the day. The beach is secluded and the restaurant offers an international menu and a full service bar.

Hot Springs

The **Agua Caliente** springs are at the Agua Caliente Hotel, with a bar/restaurant, ☎ 434-4249, on the main highway before the turn-off to Trujillo. Take a bus to Tocoa, which leave from the bus station about every hour. Take a relaxing dip in the hot springs. Admission is $5. Open daily from 7 am to 9 pm.

Where to Stay

Accommodations in Trujillo are plentiful, varied, and inexpensive. You can make your decision on where to stay based on where you want to be – downtown, near the beach close to town, on the hill close to town, or out of town.

Hotels in Trujillo

$-$$ **Villa Brinkley**, ☎ 434-4444, fax 434-4289, brinkley@hondutel.hn. This large hotel has 20 rooms with private bath and hot water, a/c, fan and cable TV, as well as two-bedroom suites with full kitchenettes. It sits on the hill up from town and offers a spectacular view of the bay. The rooms are large and comfortable; many of them have views and terraces. There are two swimming pools, a small gymnasium, ping-pong and pool tables as well as a full-service bar and restaurant, business center, meeting facilities and a souvenir shop. Ask about group discounts. Peggy Brinkley, the hotel's friendly owner, lives on the premises in her private condominium and is usually available to answer any questions. This is where I stay.

$ **Hotel Emperador**, ☎ 434-4446. The Emperor offers 10 rooms with private bath, fan and cable TV and hotel restaurant.

$ **Hotel Colonial**, ☎ 434-4011, Central Plaza. 20 rooms with private bath and hot water, fan, and cable TV.

$ **Hotel O'Glynn**, ☎ 434-4592. 25 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV.

Hotel Cocopando, Barrio Cristales, ☎ 434-4748. Offers 19 rooms with private bath and fan. This hotel is very close to the beach and a good place to absorb the Garífuna culture. But it can get noisy on the weekends due to nearby discos. There is a hotel restaurant and bar.

Hotel y Club Ejecutivo, ☎ 424-932. There are 29 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. A restaurant/bar and pool.

Hotel Mar de Plata, ☎ 434-4458. This backpacker favorite offers 12 rooms with private bath and fan.

Hotel Trujillo, ☎ 434-4202. They have 30 rooms with private bathrooms and cable TV.

Hotels on the Beach East of Trujillo

This area is quieter than in town, but also more isolated. Walking back to your hotel at night is not recommended and taxis are hard to get after 10 pm, even on the weekends. Try to make prior arrangements.

$$ **Hotel Christopher Columbus**, behind the airstrip in front of the beach, ☎ 434-4966, fax 434-4966. They have 72 rooms with private bath and hot water, a/c, and cable TV. A pool, bar and restaurant, kayak rental, beachfront, and tennis courts.

$ **Hotel La Quinta**, next to airstrip, ☎ 434-4732, 434-4398, quintru@hondutel.hn. There are 25 double rooms with private bath and hot water, a/c, fan, and cable TV. Includes meeting facilities and a restaurant.

Rentals

Villa Vista Dorada, ☎ 975-3789, in the US ☎ 404-872-4111, nbslaw@bellsouth.net. A Colonial-style villa above Trujillo with three bedrooms (two with queen-size bed and one with two double beds), living area, and a covered terrace with classical columns that you won't want to leave. Includes use of a beach just west of town – 560 feet (171 m) of private beach protected by a guardhouse, with thatched roof *champa* and shower, is included. Full-time cook/maid and nighttime guard. Rates are $100/day for up to four people and $20/day extra for a fifth and sixth person. Weekly rates are available. If you have a larger group, there is also a nice apartment available below the house with queen bed and a great view, which would increase the capacity to eight people. Reservations required.

Apart-Hotel Casa Cristina, ☎ 434-4545, cristina@hondutel.hn. Five rooms with private bath, hot water, fan, and fully equipped kitchenette. This hillside retreat in Cristina's home has a magnificent view of the bay. There's also a pool. This is the perfect place for an extended stay. English, German, and Spanish are spoken. Inquire for rates.

Hotels Out of Town

Casa Kiwi, road between Trujillo and Puerta Castillo, ☎ 434-3050, 967-2052, info@casakiwi.com, www.casakiwi.com. A very tastefully furnished and clean backpacker hotel with dorms and double rooms on a great beach. Bar, restaurant and billiard table in separate building.

$ **Hotel Agua Caliente**, four miles out Trujillo on the road to Tocoa, ☎ 434-4247. This small hotel offers 14 rooms with private bath and hot water, a/c, fan, and cable TV. It has natural thermal pools and spa services, which include massage parlor, private Jacuzzis, and natural steam baths. The hotel restaurant offers an international menu, which includes health food.

$ **Campamento Hotel & Restaurant**, 2½ miles (four km) from Trujillo on the road to Santa Fé, ☎ 991-3391. This small family-run beachfront hotel offers eight beach cabins with private bath, hot water and a/c. The open-air restaurant serves good seafood and typical north coast platters. The idyllic location is perfect for a secluded vacation. Camping is also available for $5 a tent and includes use of a bathroom. They also rent horses. Take the bus to Santa Fé and ask to be dropped off on the way or you can hire a taxi to take you for about $5. Groups of up to five persons per cabin allowed.

Where to Eat

$ **Bucanero Restaurant**, Hotel Colonial, offers breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Good hamburgers. Open daily from 6:30 am to 11 pm.

$ **Granada Restaurant**. This air-conditioned restaurant offers an international menu with meat and seafood specialties and a full-service bar. Open daily from 8 am to 10 pm.

$$ **Villas Brinkley Hotel** has a full international menu with a soup and salad bar, plus a covered terrace with the best view of the bay. The breakfast porch is another good option. Get there early and have breakfast with Peggy Brinkley. Peggy has lived in Trujillo for almost 30 years and is a great conversationalist.

Beach Champas

These are thatched-roof eateries along the beach.

$-$$ **Rincón de los Amigos**. One of the more popular places serving well-prepared seafood platters and outdoor oven-baked pizza. Full-service bar.

$-$$ **Rogue's Gallery** is another popular spot. This US expat-owned bar/restaurant serves excellent fresh seafood platters. Book exchange and full-service bar.

$-$$ **Sonia's**, farther west from the Rincón, serves well-prepared seafood platters and typical Honduran-style fare.

Beach Eateries East of Trujillo

$$ **Gringo's Bar and Grill**, on the beach behind airstrip. This is one of the nicer places to enjoy a well-prepared meal and cool tropical breezes off the ocean. Menu includes seafood, steak, and chicken platter. Open daily for lunch and dinner with a full-service bar. Southern-style barbecue chicken on Sunday.

$$ **Bahía Bar**, next door to Gringo's. North-coast-style seafood platters and typical Honduran fare. Full-service bar.

$$ **Restaurante Isabella**, Christopher Columbus Beach Resort. International menu, air-conditioned and full bar service. Open daily from 7 am until 10 pm.

The Northwest Corridor

The northwest corridor of Honduras includes the city of **San Pedro Sula**, the port city of **Puerto Cortés**, and the coast running west from Puerto Cortés. As Puerto Cortés is Central America's largest seaport, the area has been highly developed to provide port services, but not many facilities for travelers. However, **Omoa** is slowly becoming a favorite backpacker stop on the way to and from Guatemala and Belize. **Merendón Mountain** runs parallel to the ocean and offers fantastic views as well as a few nature activities such as

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- Puerto Cortés 152
- Omoa 157

hiking and swimming. Due to its proximity to the city, Puerto Cortés is a favorite weekend beach trip from San Pedro Sula for those seeking a respite from the heat. The road from San Pedro Sula to Puerto Cortés is a four-lane highway that makes for quick and easy access to the area and there are a couple of very good all-inclusive hotels that provide an array of vacation activities.

■ San Pedro Sula

Considered the industrial capital of Honduras, San Pedro Sula is the second-largest city in the country, with a population of over half a million. Just a half an hour drive from the ocean, at the foot of the Merendón mountain range, this city is on the western edge of the fertile Sula Valley. Sprawling east, the city is growing by leaps and bounds as migrant factory workers flock there in search of work, making it one of the fastest growing cities in Central America. Although not a major tourist attraction, San Pedro Sula can cater well to any visitor with dozens of hotels, restaurants, bars and nightclubs. The city is also a major transportation center, with most international flights landing either there or in Tegucigalpa; and many bus routes originate or pass through San Pedro toward all northern destinations in Honduras.

History

San Pedro Sula was founded on June 27, 1536 by Pedro de Alvarado, and originally named San Pedro de Puerto Caballos. But in just five years it became known as San Pedro Sula. For more than 300 years San Pedro remained a small town. It was nearly wiped out on different occasions by either bandits or disease. Significant growth didn't occur until 1888 when it was connected by the railroad to the Atlantic coast and again in 1902 when US banana companies established themselves in the area. The banana industry attracted workers from all over the country, contributing to the city's growth and increased commercial activity, which led to an economic boom that transformed San Pedro into Honduras' business and industrial center, which it remains today.

What's in a Name? The name Sula originated from Usula, a local dialect, and means "valley of birds."

Getting There

By Plane

The **Ramon Villeda Morales International Airport**, 7½ miles (12 km) from the city, is the entry point for most foreign travelers to Honduras. You'll have to take a taxi into town; most charge US$10. Ask the taxi driver to take you to the hotel or bus terminal of your choice, as there is no central bus station. But most of the terminals are near each other. You can also fly in from the Bay Islands, La Ceiba or Tegucigalpa.

By Bus

Between San Pedro Sula and...

1. La Ceiba

- **Hedman Alas (Express Service)**

La Ceiba, Supermercado Ceibeño #4, Road to Trujillo, ☎ 441-5357. Daily express service to SPS at 5:15 am, 10, 2 and 5:45 pm.

San Pedro Sula, Barrio Guamilito, 7 y 8 Ave 3 Calle, ☎ 553-1361. Daily departures to La Ceiba at 6 am, 10:20, 2:20, and 6 pm.

- **Viana Classe Oro (First Class)**

La Ceiba, Servicentro Esso Miramar, Blvd. 15 de Septiembre, ☎ 441-2330, offers first class service to SPS daily at 6:30 am and 1:30 pm.

San Pedro Sula, Ave Circunvalación, La Lima Exit, 200 yards from Wendy's, ☎ 556-9261. Daily departures to La Ceiba at 10:30 am and 5:45 pm.

- **Diana/El Rey Express**

At **La Ceiba** Bus Terminal, it offers regular service with nine daily departures between 6 am and 5:30 pm to San Pedro Sula.

San Pedro Sula
AV CIRCUNVALACION
10 CALLE NO
9 CALLE NO
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BLVD MORAZAN
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8 CALLE SO
9 CALLE SO
10 CALLE SO
11 CALLE SO
12 CALLE SO
13 CALLE SO
10 CALLE A
12 CALLE SE
1 AV NORTE
2 AV NE
3 AV NE
RAILROAD
16 AV NO
15 AV NO
14 AV NO
12 AV NO
10 AV NO
8 AV NO
6 AV NO
2 AV NO
1 AV SUR
2 AV SO
16 AV SO
15 AV SO
14 AV SO
12 AV SO
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8 AV SO
6 AV SO
4 AV SO
2 AV SE
3 AV SE
← to 52 53 54 55 & 64
→ to 15 & 24
to 36
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SERVICES
1. Cusuco National Park Office
2. Laundromat
3. Clinica Bendaña (hospital)
4. Post Office
5. Train Station
6. Hondutel
7. Tourist Police
8. Police

SIGHTS & LANDMARKS
9. Central Plaza
10. Monument de la Madre
11. Fuente Luminosa
12. Children's Cultural Center
13. Museum of Anthropology
14. Sampedrano Cultural Center

SHOPS
15. Imapro Sounvenirs & Wood Products
16. Danilo's Leather Goods
17. Coello Bookstore
18. Guamilito Market
19. Multiplaza Shopping Mall

NIGHTLIFE & ENTERTAINMENT
20. Confetti's Disco
21. Copán Casino
22. Sampedrano Casino
23. Multiplaza Cinema
24. Megaplaza Cinema
25. Plaza de Sula Cinema
26. Geminis Cinema
27. Tropicana Cinema
28. José Saybe Theater

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PLACES TO STAY
29. Real Intercontinental
30. Clarion
31. Princess
32. Copantl
33. Grand Hotel Sula
34. Holiday Inn
35. Honduras Plaza
36. La Cordillera
37. Almendral
38. Saint Anthony
39. El Ejecutivo
40. Gran Conquistador
41. San Pedro
42. Terraza
43. Palmira No. 1
44. Palace Inn
45. Del Valle
46. Hotel Bolivar
47. Hotel Ambassador
48. Tamarindo Hostel

PLACES TO EAT
49. Antojitos Mexicanos
50. Applebees
51. Chef Mariano
52. Don Udo's
53. Bonsai Japanese
54. Fred's Kitchen
55. Fridays Rest. & Bar
56. El Fogoncito
57. Granada Restaurant
58. La Estancia
59. La Carreta
60. Las Carnitas
61. La Espuela
62. Pizzeria Italia/Vincente's
63. Tre Fratelli
64. Hasta La Pasta
65. Cafeteria Mayan Way
66. Café Pamplona
67. La Fuente de Salud
68. Pat's Steak House
69. Klein Bohemia Café Bar

San Pedro Sula, Paz Barahona, 9 Ave NO, 6/7 Calle, in front of the Hotel Maya Imperial. ☎ 550-8355. Regular service offering nine daily departures to La Ceiba from 6:30 am to 5:30 pm.

● Catisa-Tupsa

Offers regular service providing simultaneous hourly departures from 5:30 am to 6:30 pm. daily.

La Ceiba, Mercado San Jose, ☎ 441-2535.

San Pedro Sula, 2 Ave SO, 5-8 Calle, ☎ 552-1042.

2. Tela (1½ hours)

● Hedman Alas Bus Service

Tela, Villas Telamar, ☎ 448-0570, at 8 am and 12:45 pm to San Pedro Sula.

Barrio Guamilito, 7-8 Ave 3 Calle, ☎ 553-1361. Two buses a day to Tela. The morning bus leaves San Pedro at 10 am for the airport from where it leaves for Tela at 10:50 am. The afternoon bus leaves San Pedro at 6:10 pm for the airport from where it leaves for Tela at 6:50 pm.

● Tela Express

Offers simultaneous departures from both cities in:

San Pedro Sula Terminal, 2 Ave NO, 1-2 Calle, in front of the Edificio Plaza.

Tela Terminal, Plaza San Antonio, #3.

On weekdays offers five buses a day from 7 am to 4 pm. On weekends, seven buses daily from 7 am to 4:30.

3. Tegucigalpa

● Hedman Alas (Express – four hours)

Tegucigalpa, 11 Ave, 13-14 Calle, Comayagüela, ☎ 237-7143, 238-3040. Daily departures at 5:45 am, 6:30, 8:20, 9, 10, noon, 1.30, 3, 4:30 and 5:30 pm to San Pedro Sula.

San Pedro Sula, Barrio Guamilito, 7 y 8 Ave 3 Calle, ☎ 553-1361. Daily departures to Tegucigalpa at 5:45 am, 6:30, 8:30, 9, 10:30, noon, 1:45, 3, 4, 5 and 5:30 pm.

● **Saenz Primera Clase (First Class – 3½ hours)**

Tegucigalpa, Centro Comercial Perisur, ☎ 233-4249, ☎ 553-4969. From Monday to Thursday daily departures to San Pedro Sula at 6 am, 8, 10, 2, 4 and 6 pm. From Friday to Sunday at 8 am, 10, noon, 2, 4 and 6 pm.

San Pedro Sula, 8 Ave SO, 5/6 Calle, ☎ 553-4969. From Monday to Thursday offers daily departures to Tegucigalpa at 6 am, 8, 10, 2, 4 and 6 pm. From Friday to Sunday at 8 am, 10, noon, 2, 4 and 6 pm.

● **Viana (First Class – 3½ hours)**

San Pedro Sula, Ave Circunvalación, La Lima exit, 200 yards from Wendy's, ☎ 556-9261. Daily departures to Tegucigalpa at 6:30 am (except Sunday), 9.30, 1.30 and 6.15 pm.

Tegucigalpa, Blvd. FFAA, Estación Esso Presidencial, Fte. Club Colegio Medico, ☎ 239-8288. Daily departures to San Pedro Sula at 6:30 am, 1:30 and 3:30 pm (on Saturday and Sunday) and 6:15 pm (except Saturday).

● **Norteños (4¼ hours)**

With stops in Comayagua and Siguatepeque.

Tegucigalpa, 12 Calle 6-7 Ave, Comayagüela, ☎ 237-0706. Regular bus service to San Pedro Sula every 1½ hours from 6:30 am to 4:30 pm.

San Pedro Sula, 6–7 Ave, 6 Calle, ☎ 552-2145. Service to Tegucigalpa every 1½ hours from 6:30 am to 4:30 pm.

4. Copán Ruinas (three hours)

● **Hedman Alas (Express)**

San Pedro Sula, 8-9 Ave NO, 3 Calle, ☎ 553-1361. Daily departures to Copán Ruinas at 9:50 am, 10:40 am (Fri and Sun only), and 2:50 pm.

Copán Ruins, San Lucas Hacienda Visitor's Center, two blocks north of The centRal plaza, ☎ 651-4037, 651-4036. Daily departures to San Pedro Sula at 5:30 am, 10:30, and 2:30 pm (last is Fri, Sat, Sun, Mon only).

● Casasola

San Pedro Sula, 6 y 7 Ave, 6 Calle, Barrio El Centro, ☎ 558-1659. Express service to Copán Ruinas at 8 am, 10:15, 1, and 2 pm.

Copán Ruinas, in front of Hotel Posada, ☎ 651-4078. Express service to San Pedro Sula with daily departures at 5:35 am, 7, and 2 pm.

● Transportes Gama

San Pedro Sula, Barrio Paz Barahona, 9 Ave NO, 6/7 Calle. Same location as Diana/Rey Express. ☎ 965-2711. Regular service to Copán Ruinas at 7 am and 3 pm.

Copán Ruinas, in front of Hotel Patty, ☎ 651-4421. Regular service to San Pedro Sula at 6 am and 3 pm.

5. Guatemala City vía Copán Ruinas

● Hedman Alas

Guatemala City, 2 Ave 8-73, Zona 10, ☎ 502-362-5072 to 78.

6. Santa Rosa de Copán

● Toritos y Copanecos

San Pedro Sula, 6 Ave SO, 8-9 Calle, ☎ 553-4930.

Santa Rosa de Copán, Col. Miraflores, ☎ 662-0156.

Express departures (2¼ hours) at 8 am, 9:30, and 2 pm.

Regular bus service (3½ hours) at 7 am, 8, 9:30, 11:30, 12:30, 2:30, and 3:30 pm daily.

7. Nueva Ocotepeque Border to Guatemala (3½ hours)

● Transportes Congolón

San Pedro Sula, 8 Ave SO, 9-10 Calle, ☎ 553-1174; to Ocotepeque vía Santa Rosa de Copán. Regular bus service at 6:30 am, 8:30, 10:30, 1, and 3:30 pm daily.

Ocotepeque, Calle Internacional, ☎ 653-3064; to San Pedro Sula vía Santa Rosa de Copán. Regular bus service 6 am, 8:30, 9:30, 11, 12:30 and 3 pm daily.

8. Santa Bárbara

● Cotisba

San Pedro Sula, 4 Ave SO, 9/10 Calle, ☎ 552-8889. Regular service every half-hour from 5:30 am to 6 pm daily. Direct service at 8 am and 4 pm.

Santa Bárbara, Central Plaza, ☎ 643-2387/08. Runs daily buses to San Pedro Sula (two hours) every half-hour from 4 am to 5 pm.

9. La Esperanza (3½ hours)

● Transportes Carolina

From the bus terminal in La Esperanza in front of Banco Atlántida, ☎ 783-0521. Five regular buses a day from 5:30 am to 2 pm.

In San Pedro Sula, 2 Ave, 7 Calle, half a block from Catisa terminal, offers five buses a day Monday to Saturday from 4:30 am to 12:15 pm and on Sundays at 12:15 and 1:30 pm (3½ hours) for about $3.

Getting Around

Unlike other cities in Honduras, San Pedro is a planned city and is divided into a four-quadrant grid separated into northeast (noreste-NE), southeast (sureste-SE), northwest (noroeste-NO) and southwest (suroeste-SO) sections. The avenues or *avenidas* run north-to-south and the *calles* or streets run east-to-west. All the streets are numbered in ascending order from 1 Ave and 1 Calle.

First Street or 1 Calle runs through the center of town and is the street adjacent to the Central Plaza. The city is further divided by the railroad track that runs along 1 Ave, and is commonly known as *la linea*. The area below the tracks, *abajo de la linea*, is where the eastern quadrants are located; and above the tracks, *arriba de la linea*, is home to the western quadrants. The area below the tracks downtown is a huge marketplace with stalls. Travelers are advised not to walk around here at night. Third Avenue, which also runs along the Central Plaza, is the primary downtown business district. Most of the bus terminals and many hotels are in the southwest area. Two beltways circle San Pedro Sula. The first one

is named the *Avenida Circunvalación* and the newer one, which is farther out, is the *Segundo Anillo* or Second Ring.

Heading east on 1 Calle from Central Plaza leads to the highway out of town toward the airport, El Progreso, and Tela. Traveling in this direction on the highway between the beltways is the Megaplaza Mall and several fast food outlets.

Westward from the park 12 blocks, 1 Calle is also known as Boulevard Morazán until it reaches the first beltway or the Ave Circunvalación, which is easily identifiable by the *Fuente Luminosa* or fountain with a drive-around. Continuing west from the beltway, 1 Calle becomes Ave Los Proceres. Nicer residential areas are on the other side of the beltway, as are many of the better restaurants. The area south of the fountain is commonly known as the *Zona Viva*, where the Ave Circunvalación is lined with eateries, fast food chains, bars, and clubs.

The best and safest way to get around San Pedro Sula is by taxi. If you plan to stay for more than a few days, rental car companies are listed below.

Car Rentals

All the companies listed below accept major credit cards.

Avis, Blvd Morazán, ☎ 553-0888, 552-2872.

Econocar, Airport, ☎ 668-1884.

Molinari, Gran Hotel Sula, 1 Calle, opposite Central Plaza. ☎ 553-2639.

Practicalities

Banking

Most of the banks in San Pedro Sula have branches throughout the city. Below I've listed just three that can be found in the downtown area and that can cover all of your banking needs.

Banco Atlántida is on the corner of The centRal plaza and cashes traveler's checks and makes cash advances on Visa cards. Open weekdays from 9 am to 3 pm.

Banco de Occidente, 6 Ave SO, 2-3 C. Offers Western Union and cashes traveler's checks. Open weekdays from 9 am to 4 pm and Saturday from 9 am to noon.

Credomatic, 5 Ave NO, 1-2 Calle, has an Amex and Cirrus ATM machine and makes cash advances on Visa, American Express, and MasterCard. Open weekdays from 8:30 am to 7 pm and Saturdays from 8:30 am to 2 pm.

Medical Facilities & Drugstores

Emergency Medical Center (Centro Medico de Emergencias), 11 Ave, 5-6 Calle, ☎ 553-1214.

CEMESA Medical Center, Barrio Los Andes, Ave Circunvalación NO, 11 Calle, ☎ 553-5648, 553-5647; emergency, ☎ 553-7070. Modern hospital offering 24-hour ambulance service.

Clinica Bendeña, Ave Circunvalación SO, 9-10 Calle, ☎ 553-1618.

Superfarmacia Simán, 6 Ave SO, 5 Calle, ☎ 553-0321. A very large and well-stocked drugstore. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 5:30 pm and on Sunday from 8 am to noon.

All the malls also have well-stocked drugstores.

Internet Access

Cyber cafés are numerous in the downtown area. International telephone calls and sometimes faxes can be sent from these Cyber cafés and they offer much better rates than the telephone company and most hotels. They can be found on almost every block, or so it seems. One of the most centrally located is **Hondusoft**, on the pedestrian walk south of The centRal plaza, in the Edificio Gran Vía on first floor.

Laundromats

Lavandería Express, 9 Ave NO, Calle 3. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 5 pm.

Lavanderia Almich, 9-10 Ave SO, Calle 5. Open weekdays from 7:30 am to 11:30 am and from 1 to 5 pm, and on Saturdays from 8 am to 2 pm.

Movies

There are several modern movie theaters in San Pedro Sula. The newest are in the **Multiplaza Mall**. **Megaplaza**, Lima

exit, has modern facilities. **Plaza de Sula**, 9-10 Ave NE, 4 Calle, offers surprise shows every few weeks of a new release. In the downtown area is the **Cine Geminis**, 12 Ave NO, 1 C.

Government Services

The **police station** is on 3 Ave SO, 9-10 Calle, ☎ 552-3128/3171. It's open 24 hours. The **post office**, 3 Ave SO, 9 Calle, is next to the police station and open weekdays from 7:30 am to 8 pm and Saturdays from 7:30 am to 12:30 pm. **EMS Express Mail**, 3 Ave SO 9-10 Calle, is next door to the post office. Open weekdays from 8 am to 7 pm and Saturday from 8 am to noon. The **phone company (Hondutel)** is on 4 Ave SO, 4 C. Open 24 hours with fax service from 8 am to 5 pm. The **Immigration Office** (Direccion General de Migración) is on the downtown Pedestrian Walk or *Calle Peatonal*, above the Moreira Honduras souvenir shop. Open weekdays from 8 am to 4 pm.

Tour Operators

Maya Tropic Tours, Gran Hotel Sula, across from the Central Plaza, ☎ 552-2405, info@mtthonduras.com, is a well-established company that conducts tours throughout Honduras and to Guatemala. They offer an overnight tour of El Cusuco National Park.

Explore Honduras, Col. Zerón, 21-23 Ave NO, 10 Calle, ☎ 552-6242, is a reputable company that leads tours throughout Honduras, including day and overnight tours to the El Cusuco National Park in San Pedro Sula. They also offer car rentals.

Annual Events

The **June Fair** or ***Feria Juniana*** is renowned throughout Honduras as a month of festivities that are hard to beat. **Expocentro** (Exposition Center) features industrial and consumer goods. **Campo AGAS** (agricultural/livestock exhibition facility) holds livestock and agricultural exhibits, air shows, concerts, and rodeos. Street carnivals are also held throughout the city, featuring live music and booths selling food and drinks.

The weeklong **Folkloric Festival** held in September is another fun event. It takes place in the 105th Brigade. Food stands from different countries feature native dishes; handi-

craft booths from neighboring nations sell colorful crafts; and each night different live concerts provide entertainment and dancing.

Shopping

Mercado Guamilito, 8-9 Ave NO, 5-6 Calle, an artisan's market, has a very large selection of Honduran handicrafts and is within walking distance of the Central Plaza. Open from Monday to Saturday 7 am to 5 pm and on Sunday 7 am to noon. Some of the offerings include handmade woodcarvings, woven hats, mats, baskets, and beautiful cotton hammocks, ceramics, leather goods, as well as rum and cigars.

Because of the high crime rate in San Pedro Sula, foreigners are advised to safeguard their valuables, wallets, watches, cameras and credit cards in their hotels and not to carry more cash than they plan to spend.

Casa del Sol, across the street from the Guamilito Market, is a small souvenir store that sells paintings, handicrafts and antiques. They also have a store in the Multiplaza Mall.

La Plazita, next to Casa del Sol, is a small artisan plaza with a cigar shop and a café with outdoor seating.

Megaplaza Mall is on the road to the airport and near many fast food outlets. **Lesanddra Leather**, which produces fine leather products, including beautiful handbags and suitcases, has a store here.

Multiplaza Mall, next to Real Intercontinental Hotel, one block south of the Monumento de la Madre on the road to Tegucigalpa, is a new, completely modern and fully air-conditioned mall with a food court. Two leather goods stores are here, **La Maison du Cuir** and **Latino's**.

Danilo's Leather Goods has a store at their factory, 18 Ave SO "B" #180, 9 Calle, on the corner.

Turiplaza is in Progreso about 30 minutes from San Pedro Sula and features a showroom with the largest selection of Honduran souvenirs found anywhere. This is where the **IMAPRO handicraft school** is and you'll have a chapter to observe artisans working on intricate carvings such as doors,

screens, and chests. If you rent a car, you can stop there on your way to Tela or La Ceiba. If not, take the bus to El Progreso and ask to be dropped off near the showroom. Imapro also has a store in San Pedro, 4-5 Ave NE, 1 C. Credit cards accepted.

IMAPRO showroom

Bookstores

The Cigar Shop in **Gran Hotel Sula**, Calle 1, opposite the Central Plaza, offers a small selection of English-language fiction and US magazines and newspapers.

Coello Bookstore, 9 Ave SO, 4 Calle, has a variety of used English-language paperbacks. Open weekdays from 8 am to noon and 1:30 to 5:30 pm, as well as Saturdays from 8 am to noon.

Supermarkets

Supermercado El Centro, 13 Ave SO, 2C, Barrio Suyapa.

Paiz Supermarket, Multiplaza Mall.

Eco-Adventures in National Parks

El Cusuco National Park

At more than 6,000 feet (1,829 m) elevation, El Cusuco National Park is in the Merendón mountain range, west of San Pedro Sula and clearly visible from the city. It is considered one of the most biologically diverse areas of Central America, with habitats that range from lowland deciduous forests to cloud forests reaching altitudes of 7,500 (2,286 m).

This stunning forest, which is just nine miles from San Pedro Sula, was established as a reserve in 1959. The park covers an area of over 37,000 acres and is home to a rich diversity of flora and fauna. The watersheds of several small rivers originate on the slopes of the Merendón and the Cusuco River boasts a 165-foot (51-m) waterfall. The average yearly rainfall is up to 100 inches (2,540 mm) a year, which contributes to the exuberant plant life in the area. Humid pine forests are found at lower altitudes on the south side of the park. Middle-range altitudes are home to a liquidambar forest (liquidamber is a sweet gum tree), while evergreen cloud forest species grow at

the highest elevations. On the northern park slopes hardwood species, including cedar and mahogany, grow tall and support a multitude of vines, orchids, heliconias, bromeliads, and mosses. Experiencing the transition from the lower broadleaf and pine forests to multi-layered cloud forest ecosystems is an adventure in itself.

Although you can visit and hike the park in a day, the best time to see wildlife is in the early morning, so you might want to stay overnight. Over 100 species of birds inhabit the park. The best time to see a quetzal is during the nesting season from April to May. *Cusucos* (armadillos), monkeys, tapirs, monkeys, and all five of Honduras' cat species – puma, margay, ocelot, jaguarondi, and jaguar – inhabit the park. But don't get your expectations up; the chance of seeing large animals is slim. Rainforest mammals are usually solitary and very shy creatures; and most cat species are nocturnal. Nevertheless, you will see plenty of birds, insects, and probably a few amphibians. Four trails run through the lower section of the forest.

Getting There & Staying There

The park is managed by the Fundación Ecologista Hector Rodrigo Pastor Fasquelle, above Pizzería Italia, 7 Ave NO, 1 Calle, ☎ 552-1014, fehrpf@globalnet.hn. The foundation provides information concerning the park and on how to get there, an approximately 2½-hour journey with a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Drive about 11 miles (18 km) on CA-4 and turn at the entrance to Cofradía. From there, continue on the dirt road 16 miles (26 km) that leads to Buenos Aires, a small village on the mountainside. Continue another three miles to the park's visitor center. The park is open daily from 6 am to 5 pm; the entrance fee is US$15. If you would rather travel on foot, you must take the bus to Cofradía and try to hitch a ride to Buenos Aires from there. Tour operators listed above offer one day or multi-day tours of the park. The visitor center has maps, wildlife displays, a dormitory, and a camping site. The dorm costs $12 per person, but reservations must be made in advance with the foundation.

Sightseeing

Museo de Antropologia e Historia, 3 Ave NO, 4 Calle, ☎ 557-1496. The Museum of Anthropology and History offers a comprehensive collection of artifacts such as sculptures, ceramics and paint-

ings dating back as far as 2500 BC, through the Spanish Conquest and up to the present, outlining the history of the Sula Valley region and Honduras in general. Plan at least two to three hours for your visit. Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 4pm and Sunday from 9 am to 3 pm. Closed Tuesday. Admission is about 50¢.

Fundación Ecologista Hector Rodrigo Pastor Fasquelle, 7 Ave 1 Calle, ☎ 552-1014, second floor of Pizzería Italia. This ecological resource center has displays explaining Honduras' rainforest habitats and wildlife.

Museo de la Naturaleza Biocenter, 3 Ave #, 9 Calle, ☎ 557-6598. The Biocenter has 24 environmental exhibits explaining Honduras' natural resources, including flora and fauna. Open from Monday to Friday 8 am to 5 pm and Saturday 8 am to noon. Admission is $1.

Where to Stay

As a major industrial city, San Pedro Sula offers a wide range of accommodations, many of which cater to the business traveler. They range from luxury suites to budget and dormitory-style. Mid-range accommodations are plentiful and you can easily find a comfortable hotel. Major hotels accept credit cards and have international telephone capability.

Luxury

$$$$ **Hotel Real Intercontinental**, one block south of the Monumento de la Madre on the road to Tegucigalpa, ☎ 553-0000, sanpedrosula@interconti.com. A luxury hotel with 149 fully appointed rooms with a/c and cable TV. Amenities include pool, bar, restaurants, business center, meeting facilities, and spa/gym facilities.

$$$ **Hotel Princess**, Ave Circunvalacion, 10 Calle, ☎ 556-9590, hotelprincess@globalnet.hn. This upscale hotel has 120 rooms deco-

HOTEL PRICE CHART

Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.

	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

rated in marble with a/c, cable TV, balcony, safe in room, Internet access. Two pools in a large garden, conference center, and spa/gym facilities. Clancy's bar boasts the atmosphere of an English pub, while the Garden Court Restaurant has both international and Honduran cuisine. Services include airport shuttle, parking, and laundry services.

$$$ **Hotel Copantl**, Residencial Los Arcos, Boulevard del Sur, ☎ 556-7108, fax 556-9461, reservaciones@hotelcopantl.com. This upscale hotel offers 190 rooms with a/c and cable TV. Amenities include a casino, pool, bar, restaurants, business center, meeting facilities, tennis courts and spa/gym facilities. This hotel is a fun place to stay as locals tend to use the sports facilities and frequent the restaurant, which is decorated with the work of local artists. On weekends the rates can be as low as $50.

$$$ **Hotel Clarion**, 17 Ave 2 Calle, Barrio Río de Piedras, ☎ 557-4457. Upscale hotel offering 37 rooms, with a/c, cable TV, VCR, modem lines, irons, refrigerators, voicemail, safes, coffeemakers, clock radios and Internet access. Includes laundry services, express check-in, 24-hour room service, bar, restaurant, lounge, and spa/gym facilities. Among the other services are an airport shuttle and welcome drinks, safe deposit, 24-hour security, indoor parking, currency exchange, complimentary continental breakfast and free newspapers.

$$$ **Hotel Holiday Inn Centro**, Blvd. Morazán, Calle 1. ☎ 550-9590,, www.holiday-inn-sps.com. 128 rooms with a/c, wet bar and cable TV. Pool, bar, restaurants, business center, conference rooms, and spa/gym facilities. Special lower weekend rates.

Moderate

$$ **Aparthotel La Cordillera**, Col. Trejo, seven blocks west of Cemesa Hospital (Barrio Los Andes, Ave Circunvalación NO, 11 C), ☎ 556-6116, lacordillera@globalnet.hn. Snuggled at the foot of the lush Merendón mountain range, this tastefully decorated hotel has 37 double rooms, 10 suites, and a penthouse, all with private bath, hot water, a/c, direct dial international calls, cable TV and Internet access. There is a mini-market, pool, bar, restaurant, and convention center. The hotel also offers shuttle and tour services.

$$ **Aparthotel Villa Nuria**, ☎ 559-4801. 204 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, fan and cable TV. Pool, bar, restaurant, business center, meeting facilities, and spa/gym.

$$ **Best Western-Gran Hotel Sula**, 1 Calle O, Central Plaza, ☎ 552-9999, fax 552-7000, www.granhotelsula-sanpedrosula.com. Upscale hotel with 115 rooms, each with private bath, hot water, private balcony, a/c, direct dial international calls, cable TV, and Internet access. Suites are available with kitchenettes and king-size beds. Pool, bar, 24-hour room service, Skandia restaurant open 24 hours, business center, meeting facilities, and spa/gym. This ideally-located hotel in the center of town is a popular all-hour meeting place with the locals.

$$ **Hotel Ejecutivo**, 2 Calle, 10 Ave SO, Barrio El Benque, ☎ 552-4289, fax 52-5868, www.hotel-ejecutivo.com, hotelejecutivo@123.hn. Hotel geared to the business traveler and in a new building with elevator, 40 large rooms with private bath, hot water, two double beds, a/c, direct dial international calls, cable TV and Internet access. Rates include complimentary breakfast. Restaurant, bar, private parking and laundry services.

$$ **Hotel Honduras Plaza**, 4 Ave NO, 6 Calle, Barrio Guamilito, ☎ 553-2424, www.hotelhondurasplaza.com, hotel@hotelhondurasplaza.com. 40 luxury rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, direct dial international calls, hairdryer, radio alarm clock, cable TV, and optional refrigerator and coffee maker. Free breakfast, fax and laundry services. Bar, restaurant, business center, and meeting facilities are in the hotel. Situated close to the souvenir market place, a must-see attraction.

$$ **Hotel Saint Anthony**, 3 Ave SO, 13 Calle, #13, ☎ 558-0744, fax 558-1019, www.honduras.com/saintanthony/index.htm, saintanthony@sulanet.net. 90 rooms, each with private balcony and private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Amenities include pool, Jacuzzi, the Esmeralda Bar, Miravalle Restaurant, conference center, private parking, and spa/gym. This large and airy hotel is a favorite with travelers because of its convenient downtown location.

$ **Apart-Hotel Almendral**, 16 Ave "B" SO, 12 C. #165, just behind Wendy's in the Colonia Trejo, ☎ 556-8989. This

smaller hotel has 26 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, fan, refrigerator, and cable TV with optional stove. Other services offered in the building include Internet access, coin laundry machines, and parking.

$ **Apart-Hotel Suites Del Valle**, 6 Ave #11 C. Barrio Santa Ana, ☎ 552-0134, suites-delvalle@sulanet.net. There are 13 junior suites all with private bath, hot water, two double beds, direct dial international calls, kitchenette, desk, mini-bar, a/c and cable TV. Complimentary continental breakfast, 24-hour coffee, unlimited Internet, fax services, travel agency, safety box, parking and laundry.

$ **Hotel International Palace**, 8 Ave SO, 3 Calle, ☎ 550-3838, www.intertel.hn/tourism/palace. 28 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c and cable TV. Includes a restaurant and a pleasant rooftop pool and bar.

$ **Hotel Bolivar**, 2 Ave NO, 2 Calle, ☎ 553-3224, fax 553-4823, English spoken. 65 large rooms on three floors accessible by stairs or elevator, with private bath, hot water, all with a/c, fan, cable TV, kitchenette, and balcony. Has indoor and outdoor pools, poolside bar, restaurant, and barbershop. Fax and baby-sitting services. The reasonable price and the downtown location make this hotel a good choice.

$ **Hotel Conquistador**, 7-8 Ave S.O., 2 Calle, in front of Tropicana Cinema House, ☎/fax 552-7605. The Conquistador offers 24 basic rooms with private bath, hot water, and cable TV – a popular hotel with travelers.

$ **Hotel Plaza Colonial**, 8 Ave NO, 5 Calle, Barrio Guamilito, ☎ 552-1516. Offers 26 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, direct dial international calls, cable TV and laundry service. Near the colorful artisans market, this hotel offers special rates for foreigners and a free breakfast.

Budget

The slightly seedy location of all the budget accommodations listed, with the exception of the Tamarindo Hostel, is not very safe for walking around at night.

Hotel Ambassador, 5 Ave SO, 7 Calle, ☎ 557-6824, 557-6825, fax 557-5860. 32 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c and cable TV. Restaurant and bar. Close to bus terminals.

Hotel Real, 6 Ave SO, 6-7 Calle, ☎ 550-7929. 35 very clean rooms all with double beds and private bath, some with a/c and cable TV. Rooms are set around a pleasant courtyard furnished with sofas and a TV.

$-$$ **Hotel Terraza**, 6 Ave SO, 4-5 Calle, Barrio El Centro, ☎ 550-3108, fax 557-4798. The Terraza has 44 rooms, all with private bath, hot water, and some with a/c. The restaurant serves decent meals. This hotel is conveniently close to bus terminals and the downtown area. Prices vary according to the size of the room and the amenities you choose. Single rooms with TV cost about $10, double rooms with TV and hot water cost about $15, and double rooms with TV, hot water and air conditioning are $25. The area is not especially good.

Hotel Palmira 1, 6-7 Ave SO, 6 Calle, ☎ 557-6522. 29 rooms all with private bath, some with a/c and cable TV.

Hotel Palmira 2, 7 Ave SO, 4-5 Calle, #25, ☎ 550-2363. 22 rooms with private bath, a/c and cable TV.

Hotel San Pedro, 1-2 Ave SO, 3 Calle, #2, ☎ 550-1513, fax 553-1653. 120 rooms ranging from basic accommodations to larger rooms with double beds and private bath, hot water, fan, and cable TV. Restaurant, bar and conference center. This rambling wooden structure has been popular with travelers for many years.

Tamarindo Hostel, 10/11 Ave, 9 Calle A, NO #1015, tamarindohostel@yahoo. Accommodations include dorm rooms and private rooms. There are hammocks, a nice garden, terrace, reading area, and free use of kitchen. This hostel is in a safe area near the Guamilito Market and the Hedman Alas Bus station.

Where to Eat

The working capital of Honduras, as natives call their beloved city, San Pedro Sula offers a huge array of eateries. You can catch a meal in a humble cafeteria offering local fare, an upscale restaurant with fine dining, a fancy diner, a luxurious hotel restaurant with splendid buffets and a variety of US fast-food chains.

Cafeterias

DINING PRICE CHART	
Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.	
$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

$ **Cafeteria Vony**, 7 Ave, 1 Calle, ☎ 558-1972. American-style coffee shop. Open daily from 7 am to 9 pm.

$-$$ **Cafe Latte**, Hotel and Suites Los Andes, Ave Circunvalación and 17 Ave, #84, ☎ 553-4425. International and Honduran fare with Spanish paella as the house specialty. Open from Monday to Saturday 6:30 am to 10:30 pm and 8 am to 2 pm on Sunday. Happy hour from 7 to 8 pm.

$ **Cafeteria Mayan Way**, 6 Ave SO, 4 y 5 Calle, Barrio El Centro. Budget traveler favorite offering large breakfasts, daily lunch menus and specials. Open daily from 7 am to 2 am.

$ **Skandia Cafeteria**, Gran Hotel Sula, across the street from the Central Plaza. With a US and Honduran menu, this café is a favorite among the locals for late night dinners and early morning breakfasts. Indoor air-conditioned cafeteria and outdoor poolside tables. Open 24 hours.

$ **Café Pamplona**, Central Plaza. Popular local air-conditioned eatery featuring international and Honduran fare. Open daily 7 am to 8 pm.

$ **Cafe Expresso Americano** has several locations, including the Multiplaza and Megaplaza Malls, the airport, and the southern end of The centRal plaza. This franchise offers a wide selection of hot and cold drinks such as cappuccino, frappacino, and mocha, and some desserts in comfortable air-conditioned settings. Open Monday to Saturday 6:30 am to 7 pm.

$ **La Fuente de Salud**, 5-6 Calle, 8 Ave SO. Health food store, vegetarian cafeteria and bakery offering such delights as tofu sandwiches. Open Sunday through Friday 11:30 am to 1 pm. Bakery open 7 am to 6pm.

Restaurants

$$-$$$ **Chef Marianos**, Zona Viva. Honduran platters and Garífuna dishes, with seafood specialties. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

$$-$$$ **Café Suisse**, Blvd. Los Proceres, across the street from Frogs. International menu featuring Swiss specialties. Full bar service.

$$$ **Don Udo's Bar and Restaurant**, Barrio Río de Piedras, 20 and 21 Ave SO, 1 C. This Dutch-owned restaurant is renowned as one of the finest in town and offers an international menu of gourmet platters with a good list of wines. Open from Monday to Saturday 11:30 am to 2 pm and 6-11 pm. Sunday brunch 10 am to 2 pm. The Deck, an open-air deck bar, has live entertainment. Happy hour is Monday to Saturday, 6-8 pm.

$$$ **La Espuela**, Ave Circunvalación, Barrio Los Andes. This restaurant has air-conditioned indoor seating and a pleasant outdoor area. Charcoal-broiled dishes, including *anafres*, which are pottery charcoal burners with a bowl of refried beans and melted cheese for dipping chips. Full bar service.

$$$ **La Estancia**, 12 Ave NO, 6 Calle, Barrio Los Andes, ☎ 552-3002. This is one of the best steak houses in town. They specialize in Uruguayan-style steaks, but also offer a full international menu, including fresh seafood platters.

$$$ **Granada Restaurant**, Gran Hotel Sula, across the street from Central Plaza. This restaurant serves an excellent lunch buffet, as well as a full menu and a wine list.

$$-$$$ **La Galeria**, Copantl Hotel and Club, Residencial Los Arcos, Boulevard del Sur. This open-air restaurant in the middle of the hotel serves an international menu and is open for lunch and dinner. The work of local painters is on display and is for sale.

$$$ **Pat's Steak House**, Ave Circunvalación, 5 Calle, Col. Río de Piedra. This well-established restaurant has long been one of the best in town and is famous for grilled steaks. Offers an international menu and full bar service.

$$-$$$ **Bonsai Japanese**, Col. Trejo, 17-18 Ave SO, 10 Calle, has a large variety of sushi as well as other traditional Japanese platters.

$-$$ **La Carreta**, Ave Circunvalación, 17 Ave NO, 2-3 Calle, Barrio Los Andes. ☎ 557-1087. Steak house and international menu.

$-$$ **Las Carnitas**, Zona Viva. Outdoor eatery that is a long-time local favorite serving Honduran-style grilled beef and chicken dishes. Open for lunch and dinner.

$$ **Fred's Kitchen**, Barrio Río de Piedras, 19 Ave SO, 7 C. This American-style café specializes in hamburgers and sandwiches. It has air-conditioned indoor facilities as well as outdoor tables. Open from Monday to Saturday 11 am to 11 pm.

Italian

$$ **Hasta la Pasta**, 22 Ave NO, 2 Calle, offers Italian cuisine made with homemade pastas and antipastos.

$-$$ **Vicente's Restaurant**, 7 Ave NO, 1-2 C. This is one of the oldest restaurants in town and is known for their pizza and pasta specialties. Open daily 10 am to 10 pm.

$-$$ **Tre Frattelli**, Blvd. Morazán or 1 Calle, just below Ave Circunvalación. This popular restaurant offers a variety of pasta dishes and other Italian fare. Open daily for lunch and dinner. Full international bar.

Mexican

$ **Antojitos Mexicanos** has two locations – one in the Central Plaza and the other in the Zona Viva. This long-time favorite offers Mexican-style tacos and enchiladas.

$ **El Fogoncito**, 11 Ave SO, 1 Calle or Boulevard Morazán. This franchise offers typical Mexican fare in an air-conditioned environment.

If you're hungering for a taste of a US-style meal, several franchises, including **TGI Friday's**, Boulevard Los Proceres, **Applebee's** and **Ruby Tuesday's** on Ave Circunvalación, are in the Southwest quadrant of the city. Fast-food franchises include **Wendy's** with three outlets, one in the Megaplaza Mall, one downtown and another in the Zona Viva. There are several **McDonald's** with one downtown and another near the Megaplaza Mall. There are **Pizza Huts** in

the Mall, Zona Viva, and Boulevard Morazán. **Churches Chicken** is on the Boulevard Morazán. **Little Caesar's** has two locations, one in the Zona Viva and another downtown.

Nightlife

The **Jose Francisco Saybe Theater**, Ave Circunvalación NO, next to the San Pedro Sula University and the Centro Cultural Sampedrano, 3-4 Ave NO, 3 Calle, ☎ 553-3911, hosts regular plays and concerts. Check the local newspaper or call for information about upcoming shows.

Klein Bohemia Café Bar is on the second floor of the El Benque Building, 8 Ave SO, 7 C. This cultural café offers pizza, cheese, and wines as well as a full-service bar. They have a permanent exhibit of Honduran and Central American painters and frequently present live music, theater, and other artistic endeavors. Thursday night is movie night.

Sr. Frogs, Blvd. Los Próceres SO, 19-20 Calle, has three bars and giant TV screens as well as beach volleyball, foosball, and pool tables.

Confetti's, Ave Circunvalación, is probably the oldest disco in town and a popular nightspot.

The **Hotel Copantl**, Residencial Los Arcos, Blvd del Sur, ☎ 556-7108, and the **Holiday Inn**, Blvd Morazán, 1 Calle, ☎ 550-9590, have casinos.

■ Puerto Cortés

Puerto Cortés is next to a deep, natural harbor about 40 miles (65 km) from San Pedro Sula and is Honduras' most important and largest port. Although this bustling town is not an important foreign traveler destination, people from San Pedro Sula flock to its beaches on weekends and holidays due to its proximity. Many travelers also come through here on their way to Omoa, Belize, and Guatemala by sea and bus.

Getting There

A modern, four-lane highway runs from San Pedro Sula to Puerto Cortés. You can either take the bus or drive. The trip takes about an hour on the bus or

45 minutes in a car. If you drive from San Pedro Sula, take the Puerto Cortés off the Ave Circunvalación.

By Bus

Three bus companies cover the San Pedro Sula-Puerto Cortés route. Buses leave each city every half-hour all day.

Citul, 6 Ave SO, 7-8 Calle, ☎ 553-0070. Citul offers daily service from 6 am to 6 pm. with both express and regular services. Their station in Puerto Cortés is at 4 Ave 3-4 Calle, northwest corner of the Central Plaza.

Expresos del Atlántico, Barrio Lempira, 6 Ave SO, 7-8 C. Atlántico runs from Monday to Saturday 7:30 am to 8 pm and on Sunday 5:30 am to 7.30 pm. Their office in Puerto Cortés is in front of the Central Plaza.

Impala, 2 Ave SO, 4-5 Calle, ☎ 553-3111. Impala provides daily service from 8 am to 8 pm, with express and regular services. Their station in Puerto Cortés is one and half blocks northwest from park at Ave 4, 3-4 C.

Getting Around

Puerto Cortés is a small city with a large Central Plaza, which is on 2-3 Ave, 4-5 C. The bus stations are in this area. The avenues run east-west, parallel to the docks. There is an inland lagoon southeast of town where you can take a boat to Belize.

Practicalities

Banking

Banco de Occidente, 3 Ave, 4 Calle, northwest corner of park, cashes traveler's checks and has a Western Union. Open weekdays 8:30 am to 4:30 pm and Saturdays 8 am to noon.

Banco Ficensa, one block west of The centRal plaza, has an American Express and MasterCard ATM. Open weekdays 8:30 am to 4 pm and Saturdays 8 am to noon.

Banco Atlántida, half a block from the park, has a Visa ATM. Open weekdays 9 am to 4 pm and Saturdays 9 am to noon.

Medical Facilities

Hospital Cemeco, 4-5 Ave, 8 Calle, ☎ 665-0460, 665-0057. A private hospital that is open 24 hours with an English-speaking doctor on call. Hospital ambulance service, ☎ 665-2439, 997-9267.

Internet Access

Rudon's Cyber Mundo, 1-2 Avenues, Calle 3. Open daily 8 am to 11 pm and Sunday noon-11pm.

Plaza Marinakys, 2 Ave, 6 Calle, two blocks east of park. Open Monday to Saturday 8 am to 6:30 pm.

Government Services

The **post office** and **EMS Express Mail**, 1-2 Ave, 1 Calle, are open from Monday to Friday 8 am to 4:30 pm. The **phone company (Hondutel)** is in the same building as the post office and is open daily 7 am to 8:30 pm. The **police station** at 1 Ave, 9 Calle, ☎ 665-0420, 655-1023 is open 24 hours. The **Immigration Office** is on 5 Ave, 4 Calle, ☎ 665-0582, and is open Monday to Saturday 8 am to noon and 1-5 pm.

Sightseeing

The Garífuna communities of **Travesia** and **Bajamar** are along the coast east of Puerto Cortés. As in all the coastal Garífuna villages, beachfront eateries offer typical seafood platters. Bajamar also hosts a yearly Garífuna dance festival in July on different days every year.

Adventures on Water

As you head west on the road out of Puerto Cortés the first beach you come to is the **Coca Cola Beach**, so named because of the nearby Coca Cola depot. On the weekends busloads of locals descend on the beach, most from San Pedro Sula in search of a respite from the heat. Weekdays are much quieter. There a few small eateries along the beach.

A little farther along is **Cieneguita**, which is a pleasant and well-maintained beach area. Several good hotels are here.

Where to Stay

Beach Hotels

$$ **Hotel Playa**, Cieneguita, ☎ 665-1105, 665-0453, 665-0381, fax 665-2287, www.hotelplaya.hn, hotelplaya@hotelplaya.hn, has 22 rooms, each with private bath and hot water, a/c and cable TV. Amenities include a pool with slides, restaurant with indoor/outdoor bar, business center, meeting facilities, Jet-Ski rental, catamaran tours, bicycle rental, and tours.

$$ **Hotel Casa de Playa**, Cieneguita, ☎ 665-1961, 553-2424, 553-2255. This all-inclusive hotel offers 32 rooms with private bath and hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Amenities include pool with large slide, snack bar, bar, and a restaurant with $10 buffet menu, including drink and dessert. Horseback riding, bike and boat tours are available. Special rates for four people to a room.

$ **Costa Azul Hotel**, 3 El Faro Ave, east of Puerto Cortés, ☎ 665-2260, 665-2260 fax 665-2262. This comfortable hotel has 40 rooms with private bath and hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Amenities include pool, pool tables, bar and restaurant.

$ **Palmeras Beach Hotel**, Cieneguita, ☎ 995-4662, has eight rooms. Each has private bath, hot water, a/c, fan, and cable TV. Amenities include pool, restaurant, and bar.

Frontera Del Caribe Hotel and Restaurant, ☎ 665-5001, east of Puerto Cortés, offers excellent seafood, as well as nine rooms with private bath and fan.

Hotels in Town

$$ **Hotel Villa Capri**, 2 Ave, 1 Calle, near the docks, ☎ 665-6136, fax 665-6139, villa-capri@lemaco.hn. Nine rooms with private bath and hot water, a/c, fan and cable TV.

$ **Prince Wilson Hotel**, Barrio El Porvenir, Calle Principal, ☎ 665-6512. 17 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Includes pool, restaurant, bar and meeting facilities. This hotel is not in the downtown area. If you arrive by bus, take a taxi. If you're driving, from the road leading into town take the exit to the Naval Base (there's a large sign: "Base Naval"). The hotel is on the left side of the road after the bridge.

$ **Hotel El Centro**, Av. 3, Calles 2/3, ☎ 665-1160. Basic, clean rooms with private bath, fan and TV. Singles and doubles.

$ **Formosa Hotel**, Av. 3, Calles 1/2, ☎ 665 0853. Basic rooms with private bath and fans, and some with optional TV and a/c. Accommodations are available for up to four people per room.

Where to Eat

Most of the restaurants in Puerto Cortés are near the Central Plaza. All the nicer beach hotels have restaurants that offer international menus and specialize in seafood platters from $5 to $20.

$ **La Cabaña** serves typical Honduran platters such as shish kebabs, or *pinchos*, seafood soup, and rice with shrimp. Open Monday to Thursday 10 am to 7 pm and Friday and Saturdays 10 am to 2 am.

$ **La Familia**, Av. 1/2, Calle 5, Garífuna and Honduran dishes.

$ **Wendy's** and **Pizza Hut** are both around the park.

$ **Restaurante Pekin**, one block east of the park on Ave 2, serves Chinese food.

$ **Licuados Gladys 1**, in the park, has good fruit shakes. Open Monday to Saturday 6 am to 7 pm.

Transportation to Guatemala & Belize

Transportes Citral, 3C, 1½ blocks north of the Esso station, offers bus service to Corinto on the Guatemalan border every 90 minutes from 6 am to 4 pm. The trip takes about 2½ hours.

You can travel to Belize by sea on the ***Gulfa Cruza***, ☎ 665-5556, 655-1200, which leaves from the lagoon (1½ miles south of town) every Monday at 10 am. The boat stops at Big Creek, Placencia, and finally at Belize City. Prices start at about $50 (Lps. 1,000). You must be there two hours prior to departure. It's best to call ahead.

■ Omoa

Just 30 minutes from Puerto Cortés, Omoa is a laid-back, small town, which is increasingly offering improved lodgings and a wider variety of services for the traveler. The Sierra de Omoa Mountains, part of the Merendón mountain range, create an impressive backdrop for the beach community, which is a great place to unwind.

As one of the oldest towns in Honduras, Omoa is also steeped in Colonial heritage. The **San Fernando De Omoa Fort**, built in the 1800s to repel pirate attacks, is a must-see for the history buff.

Getting There & Getting Around

From San Pedro Sula take the bus to Puerto Cortés and from there the bus to Omoa.

From Puerto Cortés, take the Omoa bus from the Esso station on 3-4 Ave, 3 Calle, which leaves every half-hour from 6 am to 7 pm. If you take any other bus, ask to be dropped at the road leading to the beach, which is a little over a mile from Omoa town. Getting back to Cortés is easy as buses leave every half-hour from the beach (45 minutes) every day except Sunday. You'll have to catch one of the highway buses on Sunday.

Omoa is a one-street town. From the highway, which is south of the beach, the road leads north straight to the beach. This road then intersects with a sandy, dirt street that runs parallel to the ocean.

Practicalities

Banking

Banco de Occidente, junction with the main road, cashes traveler's checks and does currency exchange. Open Monday to Friday 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, and Saturdays 8:30 am to noon.

Medical Services

Clínica Médica Omoa is next to the bank and the pharmacy, ☎ 658-9198. It's open from Monday to Saturday 8 am to 6 pm and Sunday 8 am to 2 pm.

Government Services

The **phone company (Hondutel)** is next to the town hall (*Municipalidad*) and is open 7 am to 9 pm. The **post office** is near Hondutel and open weekdays 8 am to 4 pm.

Laundromats

Roli's, **Pia's**, and **Hotel Bahía de Omoa**. Roli's is on the left side of the one road through town (running north from the highway), which leads to the road that runs along the coast. Hotel Bahía de Omoa is two blocks west from the intersection on the road that parallels the beach. Pías Place is another half-block down on the left.

Internet Access

Sunset Playa Resort (☎ 650-9166) and **Roli's**.

Tours & Rentals

Roli's Place, ☎ 658-9082, offers bike and kayak rentals for non-guests.

Hotel Bahía de Omoa, ☎ 658-9076, rents small sailboats and surfboards.

Sunset Playa Resort, a beachfront eatery, offers bird-watching tours. Ask for David.

Pia's Place, ☎ 658-9076, organizes snorkeling trips to nearby Sapodillo Cayes in Belize waters.

Sightseeing

San Fernando de Omoa Fortress

Construction of this massive fortress, which is the best-preserved Spanish fort in Honduras, began in 1759, but was never completed due to a series of problems. It was originally built to ward off pirate attacks on inland ore shipments, but it wasn't very successful and in 1779 became occupied by British forces. In the early 1800s, Luis Aury, a famous pirate, took brief control of the fort. During the 20th century, the fort was used as a prison. Today, it houses a museum with interesting pirate exhibits and is open weekdays from 8 am to 4 pm and weekends from 9 am to 5 pm.

Adventures on Foot

You can easily hike to two nearby waterfalls with swimming holes on the mountain behind or south of Omoa, which forms part of the Sierra de Omoa mountain range. Follow the road next to the Banco

de Occident and go right at the fork. Eventually you'll reach the river. Follow the trail that runs alongside the river until it ends. From there you have to follow the riverbank, which in some places is very rocky. You'll reach the smaller waterfall first. Continue up and you'll arrive at the larger and nicer one. Both are surrounded by dense tropical rainforest. The hike takes about 45 minutes to the larger waterfall. Wear adequate shoes for a wet hike and hopping on the river rocks.

Where to Stay

$$$ **Alcantillados del Caribe** (Caribbean Cliffs Marine Club), ☎ 655-1403, 655-1416, is on the road between Puerto Cortés and Omoa. Cliff cabins overlook the ocean. Accommodations include double beds, private bath, hot water, a/c, cable TV; some have balconies and hammocks. Activities offered include fishing and boat tours, camping, and waterfall hikes. This is probably the best hotel in the entire area.

$$ **Flamingos**, ☎ 658-9199, fax 658-9288, is a beach-front hotel with 10 rooms. They have private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. There is a full-service bar and hotel restaurant offering an international menu. Lodging includes free breakfast.

$ Río Coto, ☎ 658-9135. Six rooms with private bath, a/c and fan. There is a beach, pool, bar, restaurant and meeting facilities.

$ **Bahia de Omoa**, ☎ 658-9076, is about two blocks west from the intersection on the road that runs parallel to beach. A small beachfront hotel offering four clean and large rooms with private bath, large tubs and hot water, fan, and optional a/c. Common area with TV. Amenities include surfboards and Laser sailboats for rent.

Hotel Geminis, ☎ 658-9137. 10 rooms with private bath, a/c and TV.

Pia's Place, ☎ 658-9076, offers dormitory-style lodging in a wooden cabin with a large porch, hammocks and an ocean view. Free guest use of bikes, fishing rods, and kitchen.

Roli's Place, ☎ 658-9082, RG@yaxpactours.com, is run by Swiss expat Roland Gassman and is a favorite backpacker

lodging with five rooms. They have shared bathrooms with hot water and fans. There is also a camping site in an open shady courtyard, hammocks for rent, and a mosquito-screened dorm. Internet access and laundry services. Guests are allowed free use of outdoor the communal kitchen, drinking water, ping-pong, chess, dartboard, horseshoe pit, dart, bikes and kayaks.

Ron's Place, ☎ 658-9076. Six rooms with fans and screens, plus free guest use of bicycles.

Where to Eat

$-$$ **Flamingo's**. The bay-view restaurant serves well-prepared chicken, meat, and seafood dishes. Open daily from 8 am to 10 pm.

$-$$ **Mango's Restaurant**, Coco Bay Hotel, is a poolside spot offering good seafood and international cuisine.

$-$$ **Punto Italia** has a pasta, meat, chicken and fish menu that also includes a good Neapolitan pizza. Books, magazines, and newspapers are for sale.

Beachfront Champas

$-$$ **Donde Pancha**. Pancha is known far and wide for fresh fish and seafood platters.

$-$$ **Champa Virginia** offers generous portions at reasonable prices.

$-$$ **Tropical Breeze**, ☎ 658-9191. Specializes in seafood. Open daily 8:30-7:30 pm.

$-$$ **Sunset Playa Resort**, ☎ 650-9166, henrybelts@hotmail.com. Good prices for fried fish, veggie nachos, tacos, pizza slices and iced tea. Open Friday to Saturday from 2 pm to 1 am.

$-$$ **Tucan Eco Café**, across from Roli's, is owned by a Frenchman and offers French food, such as delicious crêpes and quiche.

$-$$ **Stanley's Restaurante**. A US expat-owned restaurant, serves a hearty seafood soup or *sopa marinera*. Open daily from 9 am to 10 pm.

The Bay Islands

The Bay Islands of Honduras, which extend up to 40 miles northeast of the country's north coast, are remnants of the peaks of the Bonacca Ridge, a submerged mountain range that extends out from the mainland's Omoa Ridge. The three larger islands, **Utila**, **Roatán**, and **Guanaja**, are long-time premier diving destinations that offer spectacular coral reefs and powdery white sand beaches. These three, together with three smaller islands just east of Roatán, **Morat**, **Barbareta**, and **St. Elena**, as well as more than 60 cays, lie on a reef system that forms part of the second-largest barrier reef in the world. It creates natural breakwaters around the islands providing calm coastal waters that are

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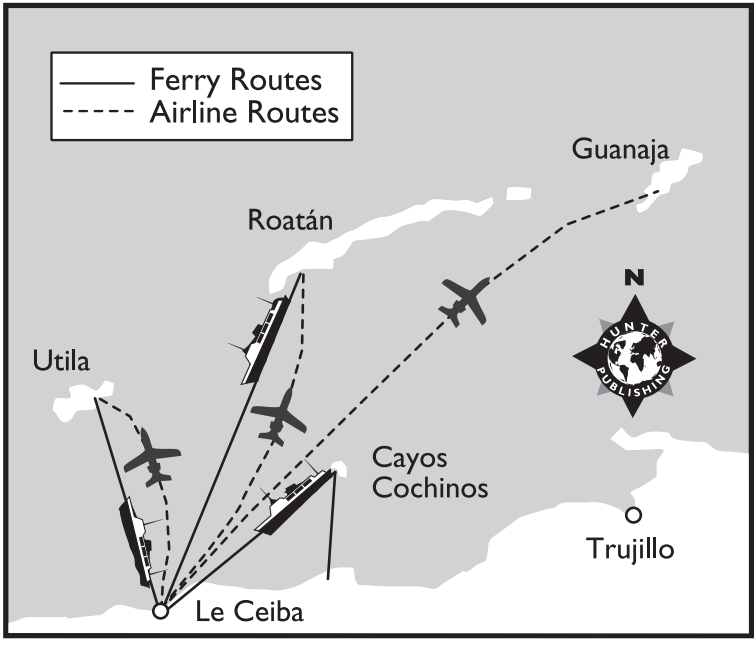


ideal for diving, swimming, and snorkeling. Turquoise blue waters with 80 to 150 feet of visibility, an average temperature of 80° F, and an amazing reef system hosting much of the marine life diversity found in the Caribbean, offer some of the best scuba diving and other water sports you will find anywhere.

Closer to the mainland are the **Cayos Cochinos**, which form part of a marine park and offer one of the most pristine environments found in the Honduras.

Explore shallow fringe reefs, stunning walls, canyons, ridges, and overhangs containing barrel sponges, giant sea fans, blue bell tunicates, and stands of black coral. Observe in their natural environment exotic sea creatures such as seahorses, wrasse blennies, sailfin blennies, turtles, dolphins, grouper, octopus, eagle rays, and the largest fish in the sea, the whale shark.

Forest systems found on the islands include mangroves, tropical forests, pine forests, and lowland marshes, which combine to form unique ecosystems.

> "One of the most botanically distinct coastal ecosystems are those of the islands' semi-deciduous forest, which is found on all of Honduras' main islands (Bay Islands, Swan Islands and Cayos Cochinos). This ecosystem represents a mix of both continental and Caribbean species, while on the Swan Islands it is more exclusively Caribbean in nature. All these islands contain endemic species of reptiles and as well as floristic elements found nowhere else in the country." – On the Protected Areas System of Honduras.

Roatán, the largest of the three main islands, is nearly 40 miles long and about three miles wide, with a mountain range that runs through the middle. Utila, the smallest island, is closest to the mainland and is visible from La Ceiba on a clear day. Utila is famous for being the least expensive place in the world to receive an open-water diving certification. Sparsely populated Guanaja, the highest of the three large islands, has

no roads. Most of the population does not even live on the island itself, but rather on the nearby cay of Bonacca. All travel between the different Guanaja communities is by boat, providing for an unparalleled, secluded vacation.

Still undiscovered by mainstream tourists, the islands are less developed and not as upscale as other Caribbean locations. They offer a less crowded and more relaxing vacation with plenty of unique adventures. Visit the iguana farms, butterfly gardens, and bird sanctuaries; take an island tour; or swim with the dolphins. Engage in innumerable water sports, or hike through tropical forests perched on hills with panoramic views of the ocean.

> **Tip:** When you visit Honduras, plan to spend as much time as possible on one or more of the islands exploring the reefs. You'll soon understand why these beautiful islands are a world-class diving destination.

■ Coral Reefs

There are over 6,000 known species of coral and four basic types of coral reefs: fringe, barrier, platform, and atolls.

- Fringe reefs follow the shoreline and grow from the beach into the ocean.
- Barrier Reefs grow parallel to the land and form a calm water lagoon between the shore and the open sea. The reef acts as a barrier between the lagoon and the ocean.
- Platform reefs are usually found offshore and have a flat upper surface with small and shallow lagoons.
- Water surrounds coral atolls, which usually starts life as a fringe reef. Sometimes they form into coral islands.

Stony corals or reef building corals live in colonies numbering from a few hundred to hundreds of thousands of individual polyps, which form elaborate and colorful formations. These formations or reefs often stretch for miles and are the habitat of thousands of plant and animal species.

Thousands of corals species exist worldwide. But reef builders or stony corals live only in warm, clear, and saline water, such

as tropical oceans. Most of the reef-building corals spend their entire lives in the same spot on the ocean floor.

Despite their immobility and the fact that warm, tropical seas are typically nutrient poor, reef-building corals have evolved to exploit their environment to the maximum and thrive. Coral reefs are the largest biological structures on earth and they have dominated tropical oceans for millions of years. They also shield land-based ecosystems from erosion caused by storms and waves. Rich biodiversity and high productivity in barren waters make coral reefs essential to the survival of tropical marine ecosystems.

> **Did You Know?** Coral reefs are often referred to as the "rainforests of the oceans." They are home to about two million species of marine plants and animals, which includes a quarter of all marine fish species. Variations of light, temperature, exposure to tides and currents and the amount of available food result in different habitats.

ABOUT CORAL REEFS

The US Oceanographic Data Center defines a coral reef as "a wave-resistant structure resulting from cementation processes and the skeletal construction of hermatypic corals, calcareous algae, and other calcium carbonate-secreting organisms." In other words, coral structures arise from their own skeletal remains, which consist mainly of limestone. Tropical oceans contain large quantities of limestone, which reef organisms use to form their shells. When they die, their skeletons accumulate forming reefs and new organisms grow on the dead surface.

Respecting the Reefs

- Do not damage the reefs with anchors and diving equipment.
- Don't collect plants or animals.

- Remember to protect the coral's health by not touching it. Bay Island dive shops generally prohibit the use of gloves to discourage touching. Please show the same consideration when you dive and snorkel independently.
- Good diving skills, correct weights, and using good buoyancy control also help minimize damage.
- Avoid swimming over shallow reef crests. This is dangerous for both humans and coral reefs. Waves can push you on or against sharp or stinging corals and force you to stand on or hold onto a coral to avoid being injured.

■ Watchable Wildlife

Below is a short list of Caribbean marine life commonly seen in the ocean surrounding the Bay Islands.

CORALS	
Azure vase sponges	Gorgonians (sea fans)
Barrel sponges	Lettuce leaf coral
Black corals	Orange elephant ear sponges
Brain coral	Pillar coral
Elk horn coral	Pink vase sponge
Finger coral	Red and pink rope sponges
Staghorn coral	

FISH & OTHER SEA CREATURES	
Angelfish	Lobsters
Barracudas	Manta rays
Basket stars	Octopi
Black durgons	Parrotfish
Blennies	Porcupine fish
Blue chromis	Rays
Blue runners	Sergeant majors
Blue tangs	Scorpion fish (rock fish)
Brittle stars	Seahorses
Butterfly fish	Sharks
Damselfish	Shrimp

Dolphins	Silversides
Eels, moray & spotted	Spider crabs
Fairy basslet	Spotted eagle rays
Flounders	Squirrelfish
French angelfish	Tangs
Gobies	Trunkfish
Groupers	Turtles (hawksbill)
Grunts	Yellow snappers
Harlequin bass	Whale sharks
Jewfish	Wrasse

■ History

The distinctive culture of the Bay Islands is the legacy of conquest and piracy, which resulted in settlement by Europeans, Africans, and those of Caribbean descent.

Paya Indians inhabited the islands for centuries prior to any European presence. The Paya lived a nomadic, hunter-gatherer, fishing lifestyle and used canoes to travel between the islands. They also engaged in trade with the Maya and other tribes from the mainland. The Paya weren't as numerous or as advanced as the Maya and knowledge of their culture is sketchy because they left no written history. They lived in non-permanent homes of sticks and thatch and used simple tools.

> *Today, locals use the term "yaba ding dings," to refer to Paya artifacts found throughout the islands in burial and ceremonial sites.*

The following description of native island peoples is an account by Fernando, Christopher Columbus's second son, made during his fourth voyage to the Americas. Presumably, he is referring to the Paya island inhabitants and Maya traders.

> *Having come to the island of Guanaja, the Admiral sent ashore his brother Bartholomew, with two boats. They encountered people who resembled those of the other islands, but had narrower foreheads. They also saw many pine*

trees and pieces of earth called cálcide, which the Indians use to cast copper; some of the sailors thought it was gold.... by good fortune there arrived at that time a canoe long as a galley and eight feet wide, made of a single tree trunk like the other Indian canoes; it was freighted with merchandise from the western regions around New Spain. Amidships it had a palm-leaf awning like that on Venetian gondolas; this gave complete protection against the rain and waves. Underneath were women and children, and all the baggage and merchandise. There were twenty-five paddlers aboard, but they offered no resistance when our boats drew up to them.

Many of the almonds [cacao beans] the Indians of New Spain use as currency; and these the Indians in the canoe valued greatly, for I noticed that when they were brought aboard with the other goods, and some fell to the floor, all the Indians stooped to pick them up as if they had lost something of great value.

Following Columbus's arrival, Spanish Conquistadores and British pirates fought over control of the Bay Islands for centuries. The islands provided a safe harbor and the abundance of mahogany and other woods made them an ideal location for refurbishing wood supplies. The pirates would prey on Spanish galleons departing from Trujillo on their way back to Spain. During the 1600s an estimated 5,000 French, English, and Dutch pirates inhabited the islands.

According to local legend, the loot from Henry Morgan's 1671 raid on Panama is buried somewhere on Roatán.

The pirate problem became so acute that in 1641, the Spanish Governor of Honduras ordered the islands abandoned. After the Spanish left, the pirates quickly set up base in Port Royal, Roatán. In 1650, the Spanish, after an initial and unsuccessful attempt to overcome the port, returned to the mainland to recruit more soldiers. They then came back, outnumbering the pirates 10 to one. After some very heavy fighting, they were able to drive the English out of Port Royal and remove the remaining Indian population to the Guatemalan mainland. It wasn't until 1797 that the first permanent settlers arrived when the British abandoned a group of 3,000 rebellious Garífuna from island of Saint Vincent on Roatán. Eventually most of the Garífuna moved to Trujillo on the mainland, but a small group remained and established Punta Gorda, a Garífuna community that still exists today. In 1830, a new wave of immigrants comprised of white farmers from the Cayman Islands and freed black slaves, first arrived on Utila, and eventually settled on all islands. These immigrants and their descendants consider themselves the original "Islanders." The British reestablished themselves in the islands and declared them a Crown Colony in 1852. But they were obliged to cede control under the Wykes-Cruz Treaty of 1859 and return sovereignty to Honduras. The islanders, who considered themselves British, did not agree with this move. Relations between the islanders and mainlanders were strained for centuries due to the history of British-Spanish conflict.

Although the cultural gap is slowly closing, before the 1980s, the islands remained relatively untouched by Honduran influence. But mainlander migration to the islands and establishment of Spanish as the official language taught in the schools has homogenized the population. In the 1990s, the Honduran government legalized the sale of coastal lands to foreigners. Subsequently, expatriates are the latest wave of residents to hit the islands.

■ Getting There

By Plane

Non-Stop International Flights

Continental Airlines offers two non-stop flights from Houston to Roatán every Saturday (2¾ hours). Toll-free ☎ 1-800-231-0856 in the US or www.continental.com.

- Flight #1894: Houston-Roatán, 9:30 am to 11:10 am
- Flight #1895: Roatán-Houston, 12:35 pm-4:26 pm
- Flight #1864: Houston-Roatán, 12:50 am to 2:34 am
- Flight #1865: Roatán-Houston, 3:20 pm-7:15pm

Taca offers one non-stop flight from Houston to Roatán every Saturday. Toll-free ☎ 1-800-535-8780 in the US or www.grupotaca.com. This airline also offers direct flights on Saturday from El Salvador to Roatán at 9:50 am.

- Flight #431: Houston-Roatán, 3:50 pm-6:20 pm
- Flight #430: Roatán-Houston, 10:30 am to 2:15 pm
- Sundays

Taca offers non-stop flights from Miami to Roatán on Sundays.

- Flight #380: Miami-Roatán, 3:15 pm-5:15 pm
- Flight #381: Roatán-Miami, 9:30 am to 1:30 pm

Flights From Mainland Honduras

If you are in either San Pedro Sula or Tegucigalpa, you can catch a connecting flight through La Ceiba to the Bay Islands. All local flights to the Bay Islands stop or originate in La Ceiba. All you need to do is get there. The duration of flights to Utila, Roatán, and Guanaja is about 20, 30 and 40 minutes, respectively. Local carriers include Isleña, Sosa, and Atlantic Airlines, which fly to and from the islands several times a day. All three have offices on La Ceiba's central plaza and at the airport.

La Estanzuela Tours, ☎ 504-651-4515, laestanzuela_tours@yahoo.es, manages a private airstrip in the Copán region and offers charter flights, as well as the first commercial service to

Copán Ruinas from the island of Roatán every Thursday. A round-trip ticket costs $180, one-way costs $90; flights depart Roatán at 8 am and return from Copán the same day at 3 pm.

By Sea

On the Ferry

Daily ferry service is available in La Ceiba to and from the islands of Utila and Roatán. Currently there is no ferry service to Guanaja. The best way to get there is by plane. No bus routes run to the ferry dock, so you'll have to take a taxi. If you are arriving at the central bus terminal or the airport in La Ceiba, take a taxi to the ferry dock (*Muelle de Cabotaje*). From either place, taxi fare will run $10-$12. From the center of La Ceiba, you'll pay between $8 and $10.

There is a **Tourist Information Office** behind the Utila Princess ticket office at the La Ceiba docks, which provides free general information and hotel reservations.

If you suffer from seasickness, all the carriers will provide you with motion sickness tablets free of charge. You should take the tablet at least half an hour prior to departure.

> **Tip:** It's a good idea to call the dock and make sure the ferry is leaving as scheduled. During the low season, the number of daily voyages is sometimes limited or cancelled due to bad weather or repairs. During the Easter week holiday, the number of daily ferry trips is usually increased. It takes one hour to reach Utila and two hours to get to Roatán.

The ***Utila Princess*** travels to and from Utila twice a day; ☎ 994-9306, 997-7978 in Utila; ☎ 425-3390, 425-3392 in La Ceiba.

Safeway Marine runs the ***Galaxy*** to Roatán; ☎ 445-1795, 445-1250 in Roatán; ☎ 991-6353 in La Ceiba.

Ferry	Cost	Departure Times	
Utila Princess	$9 one-way; $18 round-trip	Utila-La Ceiba 6:30 am	La Ceiba-Utila 9:30 am
		Utila-La Ceiba 2:30 am	La Ceiba-Utila 4:30 am
Galaxy	$12 one-way; $24 round-trip	Roatán-La Ceiba 7 am	La Ceiba-Roatán 10 am
		Roatán-La Ceiba 1 am	La Ceiba-Roatán 4 am
Tropical	$12 one-way; $24 round-trip	Roatán-La Ceiba 2 pm	La Ceiba-Roatán 8 pm
Nautical	$12 one-way; $24 round-trip	Roatán-La Ceiba 7:30 am, except Saturday	La Ceiba-Roatán 3 pm, except Saturday

Marinas

The following marinas provide dockage for those who arrive on private vessels. You can also dock in both West End and West Bay where mooring lines are installed so anchors don't damage the reef. You must report to the Port Captain's Office in Coxen Hole. However, security is not very good in Coxen Hole and it is not recommended you leave your vessel unattended there. Better to dock somewhere else and travel overland to Coxen Hole.

Barefoot Cay Marina, www.barefootcay.com, is a private cay located centrally on Roatán's south shore. Enter from Brick Bay or French Harbor. The marina at Barefoot Cay has 325 linear feet of dock space with side-tie moorage, which can accommodate yachts up to 140 feet with up to a 10-foot draft. Two mooring buoys are also available. The dock space also provides primary moorage on the cay on the shore side of the canal that separates Barefoot Cay from the island of Roatán and space for up to 65-foot yachts. A boat-launch ramp is also on the shore side. Services include full security, electrical pedestals with 30 and 50 amp, high-speed Internet, potable water and cable TV to each slip. Spacious bathrooms have hot water showers, ceiling fans and large mirrors. Customs and immigration services also offered. Barefoot Cay monitors VHF

channel 18 (while in the office), drop-ins are welcome, and someone is always there to help you tie up. Call ahead and someone will guide you through the Brick Bay entrance.

Marina rates are as follows: $.60 per foot/day or $18 per foot/month. For six months or longer: $10 per day for mooring buoys, $.35 per KW electricity, $.07 per gallon of water.

Fantasy Island Dive Shop & Marina, www.fantasy-islandresort.com, features dockage for a fleet of six custom 42-foot dive boats directly adjacent to the spacious guest-gear storage area, underwater photo center, compressors, and equipment rental facility. SSI/PADI certified dive masters offer resort courses and certification courses. The resort also boasts one of the two hyperbaric chambers on the island.

Marina rates for boats less than 45 feet, $35 a day or $25 a day for more than seven days; boats 45 to 60 feet, $60 per day or $45 per day for more than seven days; and boats over 60 feet, $120 per day or $100 per day for more than seven days. Other services include electricity for 30¢ per KW (by meter), cable TV for $1/day, water 15¢ per gallon (by meter), diesel for sale at market price.

Parrot Tree Plantation Marina, www.parrot-tree.net, ☎ 455-5725, 455-5917. Facilities include: 20 berths alongside (up to 75 feet in length), 10-foot maximum draft; electricity 120, 240 single-phase, 30 and 50 amp service; water; phone available; fuel; security and parking; garbage disposal; toilets on site. Contact the marina for rates, which depend on the size of the boat and length of stay.

Roatán Dive & Yacht Club Marina, www.roatan-yachtclub.com, ☎ 455-5233, info@roatanyachtclub.com, is equipped with 12 slips. Contact the marina on VHF 16. Marina pedestal hookup offers: electrical power (30A/125/220V and 20A/125/220V circuit breakers), 3/4-inch water hose connection, cable TV (US channels), a night light, and a telephone connection. There is an access road to the dock and a lit walkway from the marina to the hotel. 24-hour security, bathrooms, and showers are available at dockside.

Long-term rates are $8 per foot per month. Daily and short-term rental is 60¢ per foot per day. Electricity is 32¢ per KV hour. Water is 5¢ per gallon.

■ Roatán

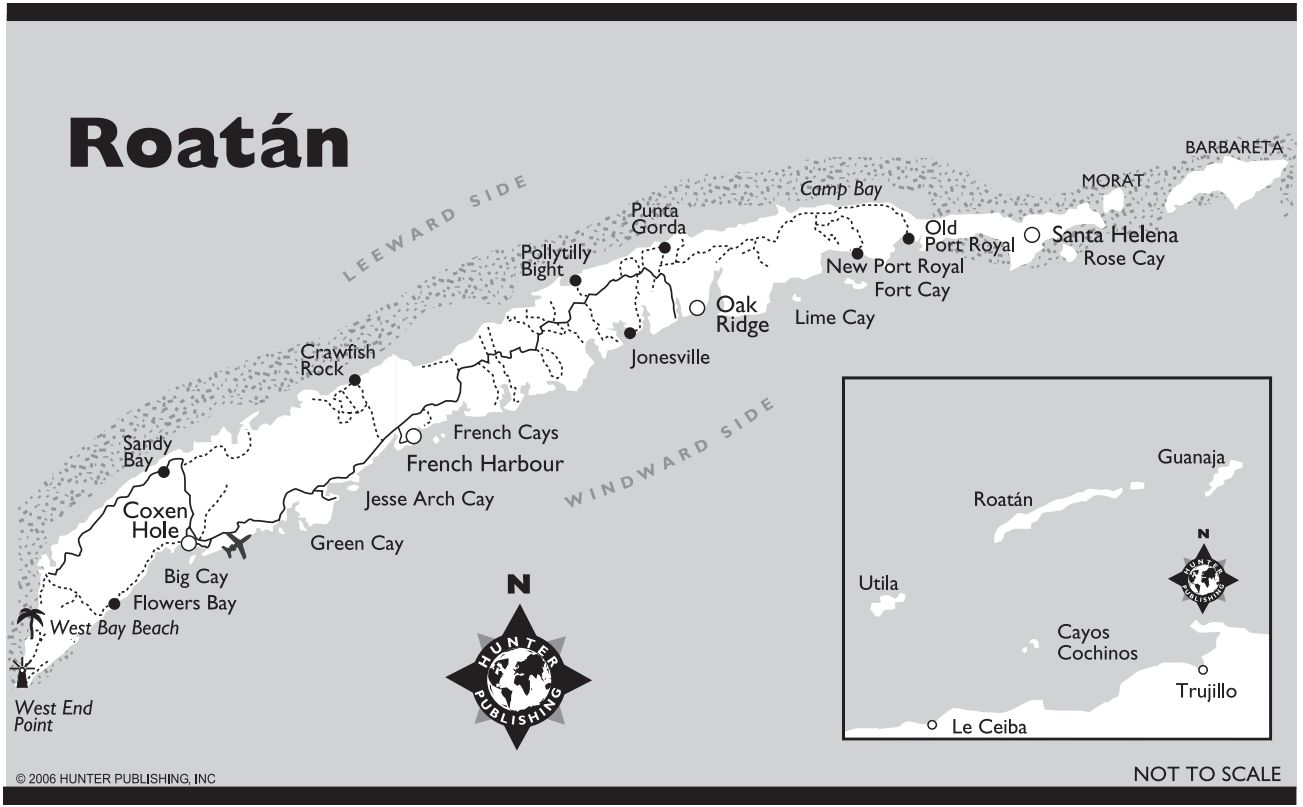
Roatán is the largest of the Bay Islands and offers the most services for travelers and locals alike. In the opinion of many, Roatán is the best island for a vacation. Although each island has its own advantages and Utila and Guanaja do provide many options for travelers, these are not as diverse as in Roatán.

Fishing and boat building are the principal economic activities in the Bay Islands. However, during the past decade, tourism services have increased dramatically. Still Roatán retains its native "islander" charm and allows the traveler to experience local culture on a personal level. In addition, you can still find many secluded areas and walk for miles on the beach by yourself.

Roatán's name originated from the name of the Indian village Roa, the largest of the four pre-Hispanic Paya Indian settlements on the island, which was near present day Port Royal. Today, Roatán has about 40,000 friendly, outgoing inhabitants who speak both Spanish and English.

TOP REASONS TO VISIT ROATÁN

- Beautiful beaches
- Butterfly garden
- Great seafood
- Spectacular wall diving
- Unlimited snorkeling
- Swim with the dolphins
- Marine Reserve
- Iguana Farm
- Punta Gorda Garífuna Village



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Getting There & Getting Around

Unless you come by private launch, you'll arrive and depart from Roatán in Coxen Hole. Coxen Hole is the capital of the Department of the Bay Islands. Most of the government offices are there and it is a commercial and banking center. However, the town itself is not very charming, and you probably won't want to stay there.

By Bus

Coxen Hole is also the transportation hub for Roatán and the place to catch the minibuses. Minibuses run during the daytime every 20 to 30 minutes from the main street to West End and Sandy Bay and east to Brick Bay, French Harbor, Oak Ridge, and Punta Gorda. They travel along the paved road that extends west-to-east the length of the island. Bus fares range from Lps. 10 (50¢) for Coxen Hole to West End to Lps. 20 ($1) for Coxen Hole to Oak Ridge on the East End. Anywhere closer should cost slightly less. Shared taxi fares are about double the bus rate.

By Plane

If you arrive by plane, the Roatán Airport is on the south side of the island and two miles east from Coxen Hole. You can take a taxi to your hotel from the airport for $5-$10. Dozens will offer their services. Or walk to the main road and take a minibus ($1) to Coxen Hole and catch the minibus or a shared taxi from there to your final destination.

The ferry dock also is in Coxen Hole, which offers both bus and taxi service.

By Taxi

In Coxen Hole ask where the shared or *colectivo* taxis are stationed that travel to your final destination.

Taxis are usually available from everywhere to anywhere, especially if you make previous arrangements. There is a sign posted for taxi rates in the airport and it's a good idea to check out the printed prices. Remember, though, that taxi prices are always negotiable in Roatán and they always go up the later it gets.

Tourist Traps: Bus and taxi fares are in Lempiras – not in US dollars. Ask the bus or taxi driver before you get in the vehicle how much the fare is in Lempiras to your destination. A recent trend among taxi drivers is to charge tourists double or more what the locals pay. Also specifically ask the driver if the price offered is a private *directo* or a shared *colectivo* fare. Most drivers of the shared taxis (which require a special permit) have no qualms quoting an exorbitant price to innocent-looking newcomers. They make a fast profit with less wear and tear on their vehicle.

Hiring your own taxi will cost four to five times more than a shared cab. A shared taxi with four people to West End costs Lps. 80 or about $5. If you hire the taxi to take only you that's how much (or a little more) you'll pay.

Tip: You can get just about anywhere you want to go by taxi or mini-bus in the daytime. At night, ask in advance if taxis are available wherever you plan to be or arrange for one to pick you up. There is so much to do during a short visit that you won't have time to be driving around much. If you would really like to explore the island or plan a prolonged stay that includes an active nightlife, renting a vehicle may be more economically feasible.

By Car

If you would like to get a better look at the island, your best bet is renting a car. Rental rates run from $35 a day for a standard car, $45-50 a day for a 4x4 or 4x2 Jeep or pick-up, and up to $85 for a larger SUV with extras. Most agencies require a valid driver's license, passport, and credit card to rent a car. Some require that the driver be at least 25 years old.

Rental Car Agencies

- **Roatán Airport**

Toyota Rent-a-Car, ☎ 455-1166.

Avis Rent-A–Car, ☎ 445/455-0122, 455-1568.

Caribbean Rent-A-Car, ☎ 455-6951.

Coral Reef Rent-A-Car, ☎ 445-1990, is across the street from the airport, next to the Exxon station.

- **Coxen Hole**

Arena Rent a Car, ☎ 455-1882.

- **French Harbor**

Island Rentals, ☎ 455-5417.

- **Sandy Bay**

Sandy Bay Rent-A-Car, ☎ 455-3038, www.roatanet.com/rentacar.

- **West End**

Roatán Sales and Rentals Rent-A-Car, ☎ 445-1171, www.roatansalesandrentals.com.

By Bicycle, Scooter & Motorcycle

Captain Van's Rentals, Half Moon Bay, West End, www.captainvans.com, ☎ 403-8751, offers motorcycles, scooters, and mountain bikes for rent. Roatán has over 50 miles of meandering scenic roads. Explore the island at your leisure on a two- or three-wheeler. Captain Van provides a complimentary and detailed island treasure map that will lead you wherever you choose to go. Rent Schwinn mountain bikes for $9 a day or $36 a week; a two-person Yamaha scooter for getting up the hills with ease costs $39 a day or $185 a week; or a Honda dual-sport motorcycle for on and off the road will be $45 a day or $200 a week. All daily rentals are for 24 hours, helmets included free of charge, credit card imprints required for damage deposits. Rental and transfer services for cruise ship passengers are also available.

By Sea

Water taxis are available to and from West End to West Bay. The fare is Lps. 30 ($1.60) during the day and Lps. 35 or about $1.80 in the evening. Look for the dock near Foster's Bar in West End. There are two easily distinguishable pick-up spots in West Bay for the return trip.

Practicalities

Government Services

In Coxen Hole these include the **Tourism Police**, ☎ 199; the **post office** (open weekdays 8 am to noon and 2-5 pm or Saturdays 8 am to noon) near the Main Street Plaza; and **Hondutel (phone company)**, found behind Bancahsa and open daily from 7 am to noon and 1-9 pm.

Banking

Go to the bank while you are in Coxen Hole, as most of the smaller communities don't have banking facilities. Making a "money" run to Coxen Hole or French Harbor can take two or three hours depending on the lines in the banks. Many islanders recommend not using the available ATM machines because they can eat the credit cards or don't debit your account correctly.

Any bank will exchange currency for you. **BGA** (open weekdays 8:30 am to 3:30 pm, Saturday from 8:30-11:30 am), **Credomatic** (open weekdays 9 am to 5pm, Saturdays 9 am to noon.) will make cash advances for Visa and MasterCard, and **Banco Atlántida** (open weekdays 9 am to 5 pm, Saturdays 9 am to noon), will make cash advances on Visa cards.

Medical Facilities & Pharmacies

Cornerstone Decompression Chamber, Clinic and Medical Facilities, Anthony's Key Resort, Sandy Bay, ☎ 455-1049, 445-1003. On call 24 hours for emergency medical service. Open 8 am to 5 pm for basic medical service.

Decompression Chamber, Fantasy Island Resort, French Key, ☎ 455-5128, toll-free 800-676-2826 in the US.

Woods Medical Centre, Coxen Hole main road, ☎ 445-1080. Services offered include emergency, maternity, intensive care, and surgery. 24-hour service.

Pharmacy & Medical Clinic Brito, French Harbor, ☎ 455-5075.

Pharmacy & Medical Clinic Dr. Johnson, French Harbor, ☎ 455-5822.

Farmacia Roatán, Coxen Hole, ☎ 445-1260.

Central Drug Mart, Coxen Hole, ☎ 445-1480.

Drug Store Dima, Coxen Hole, ☎ 445-0000.

Farmacia Cime, Coxen Hole, ☎ 445-1700.

Larger medical centers are available in San Pedro Sula (on the mainland) and La Ceiba. An air ambulance is available for emergencies.

Support Groups

AA meetings are held Monday and Thursday at 6:30 pm at the Qué Tal Café in Coxen Hole, and on Wednesday at 7 am at the Roatán Real Estate Office in Anthony's Key Resort. ☎ 993-3215, 445-4116.

Internet

Paradise Computers Internet Cafés, www.paradise-computers.com, can take care of all your Internet, e-mail needs, and international phone calls, while you enjoy coffee and snacks. They have several locations as follows:

- At Coxen Hole in the newly constructed Mango Center, where you can check your e-mail, make phone calls, send and receive faxes, print, photocopy, and laminate paper.
- West End, next to Pura Vida, where the staff will assist you with either an Internet connection or telephone service to make local or international calls. There are eight computers for your use. You can also download your photos to a CD, print or photocopy them.
- At the Cruise Ship Dock, with three computers and several phone lines.
- At the airport, where they share space with an information center directly in front of the ticket counters. There are two computers for public use as well as international phone service.

Shopping

Diddily's Gift Shop, www.westendroatan.com, has two locations, one in West End across the street from the Seabreeze Inn, and one in the Main Street Mall, just east of the cruise ship dock. Diddily's offers a wide selection of local and Central American crafts, as well as a great selection of women's and men's beachwear, including beautiful Indonesian sarongs and sun dresses at great prices and T-shirts in many different colors, sizes, and designs. Handicrafts include original Lenca pottery, silver jewelry, embroidered wall hangings, carved wood boxes, and jade objects. Honduran coffee, rum, and cigars are available as well as work by local artists. The store is open Monday through Saturday from 10 am to 6 pm May to November. From December to April, it's open daily 10 am to 6 pm.

The **Main Street Mall**, www.roatan-mainstreetmall.com, near the Cruise Shop Dock, is a new shopping center where you'll find:

- Arna's Hand Carved Mahogany, which offers carved chests, doors and other wood products; they will ship your purchase home for you.
- Leather World, selling hats, purses, wallets, belts and many other leather gifts.
- Best Coffee and Beverage, with cold beverages and delicious Honduran coffee.
- V.I.P. Duty Free, the duty free store, selling wines, liquors, cigarettes, cigars and more.
- Pixie's Kiosk. with a great selection of handmade jewelry and specialty items.

Castle Gallery of Cameos, ☎ 995-7421, www.stonecastlecameos.com, cameos@stonecastlecameos.com. The art of cameo carving, which originated in ancient Greece and Rome, continues on the island of Roatán at the Castle Gallery. Cameos are hand-carved individual pieces of double-layered seashell with a steel burin. Each cameo is a unique handmade object and comes with its own

certificate of authenticity. Visit the factory showroom near the cruise ship dock.

Yaba Ding Dings is a gallery of local arts and crafts in Coxen Hole. They sell pewter, Panamanian molas, Lenca pottery, fine cigars, Garífuna folk art, silver jewelry, original artwork, silk paintings, original t-shirts, handmade candles, Honduran woodcarvings, tropical clothing, hand-made baskets and more. Yaba Ding Dings is in the Bonilla Building, next door to Warren's groceries and a short walk from the Cruise Ship Dock. Open Monday through Saturday, 9 am to 5 pm.

New Souvenirs and Tours in Coxen Hole is across the street from Warren's Grocery. This well-stocked gift shop sells beautiful wood carved chests, wall hangings, mobiles, t-shirts and beach clothes, jewelry and tons of other stuff, such as key chains, postcards, and mugs. Open daily from 8 am to 6 pm.

Joana's Boutique, Coxen Hole, is near the corner of the main road intersection with West End.

Supermarkets

HB Warren in Coxen Hole is a wholesale and retail supermarket offering a wide array of services including groceries, liquors, kitchenware, appliances, toys, clothing, souvenirs, office supplies, toiletries, and a snack bar serving fast food. The **Mini Mart** in Coxen Hole is at the gas station on the main road near the entrance to town. Owned by Warren's Groceries, the Mini Mart has a large selection of basic foodstuffs. This is a good place to stock up if you have a rental with kitchen facilities. The **Municipal Market Place** in Coxen Hole offers local fruits and vegetables. The freshest fish and seafood are available at the **Flying Fish** (☎ 445-1245) in Coxen Hole. Commercial fishermen bring their daily catches to this processing plant, which neatly cuts and packages the product. This is definitely the best option if you're planning a home-cooked meal.

Eldon's market in French Harbor has the largest selection of groceries on the island. **Woody's Groceries** is a small market in West End with basic foodstuffs. The **Bulk Gourmet**, Jackson Plaza, ☎ 969-7591, sbroatan@earthlink.net, across from the Texaco station on the way to French Harbor, is a deli-grocery that offers a great selection of gourmet kitchen

and cooking ingredients sold in bulk quantities. Selection includes US prime and choice beef, caviar, imported cheeses, pastas, nuts, candies, jams, olives, beer, sodas, pickles, flour, mustards, vitamins, personal care products and organic foods. **The House of Meats**, also in the Jackson Plaza, sells cured beef, pork, and specialty meats.

The Coconut Tree Store in West End offers a variety of grocery goods, liquor, drinks, refreshments, and ice. The store is on the corner of the West End entrance intersection.

Learning

The Central American Spanish School is offering individual or group Spanish classes at both Tropicana Beach Resort in Sandy Bay and at Bananarama in West Bay. They will also teach at your home with the additional cost of transportation. Call Sylvia at ☎ 374-6563 or Angela at ☎ 403-8021, cass@laceiba.com.

Massage

Santé Wellness Center, Day Spa and Retreat, Parrot Tree Plantation, Second Bight, ☎ 991-0470, www.santewellnesscenter.com, sante@globalnet.hn. They offer a full line of professional spa services and therapeutic massages. All services performed by a Board Certified Adult Nurse Practitioner, California State Licensed Esthetician, and Certified Massage Therapist. Spa Services include such wonders as European facials, fruit acid facial peels, salt glo, herbal body wraps, enzymatic sea mud wraps and back purifying treatments. Massages available include Swedish, Tui-Na, deep tissue, Marma Point, reflexology, lymphatic drainage, and Ayurvedic facial massage. Ask about special package rates.

Healing Hands Massage, Mariposa Lodge, West End. ☎ 994-9626, www.mariposa-lodge.com/shiatsu.html, gives Shiatsu and European massages on the beach.

Keyla Massage and Body Therapy, Coconut Tree Cabins, West Bay Beach, ☎ 966-3287, www.roatanet.com/massage. Keyla specializes in a wide range of massage disciplines such as therapeutic, relaxation, stress relief and chiropractic. Visit Keyla or arrange for a massage at your accommodation or on the beach of your choice! Prices range from $15 to $50. Open daily from 8 am to 4 pm.

Publications

Coconut Telegraph magazine is available at the Cooper Building in Coxen Hole.

Bay Islands Voice, www.bayislandsvoice.com.

Tours

Casi Todo Bookstore (books, information, tours) ☎ 445-1944, averyl@globalnet.hn, sells used books, is a tourist information center, and also offers mini-bus island tours on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

Roatán Cab Tours, www.roatancruiseshiptours.com, offers several tours, including a West End Tour and an East End Tour for $20 per person. Additional activities, such as visits to West Bay Beach, Punta Gorda Garífuna Center, Marble Hills Organic Farm, and Paya Bay Resort, can be included in either of the above tours for an extra fee.

Roatán Air Services, www.roatanair.com, offers half-hour and one-hour sightseeing tours from $54 to $289 of Roatán, Utila or Cayos Cochinos, as well as private charter flights and emergency medical evacuation.

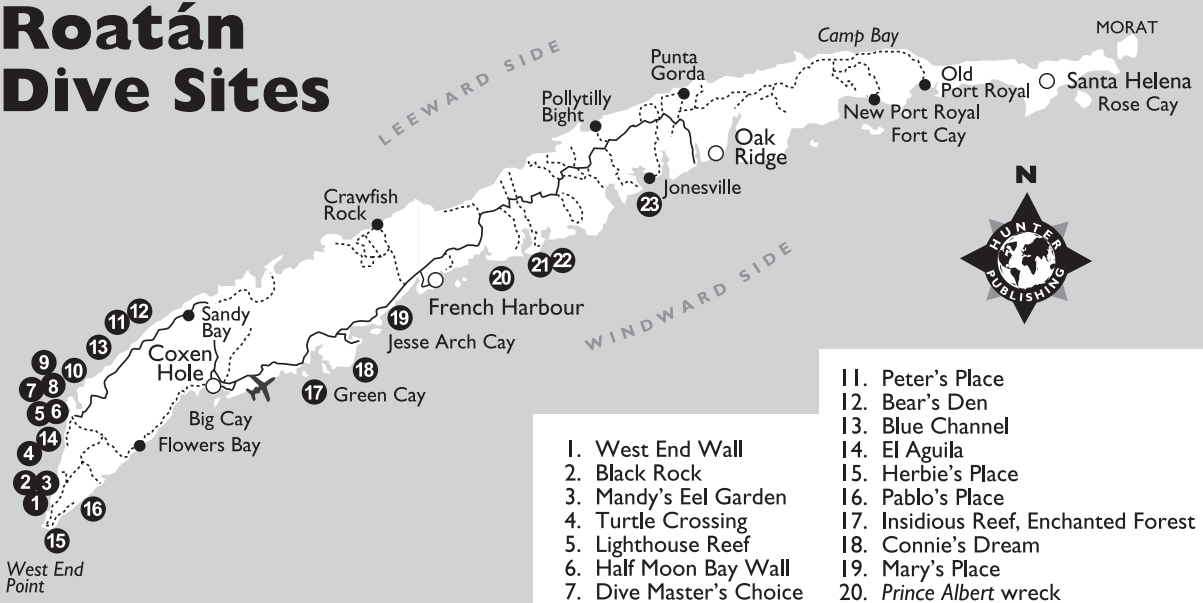
Annual Events

The **Bay Islands Triathlon** is held every March, attracting first-class athletes from all corners of the globe. For more information go to www.bayislandstriathlon.com.

Punta Gorda commemorates the arrival of the Garífuna to Roatán every April 12. Festivities include music, dancing and an abundance of food.

The **Annual West End Fishing Tournament** is held every September and includes first- , second- and third-place prizes as well as ladies and junior categories. You can also compete for the "The Best Fish Story Sportsmanship Award." Fishing methods permitted include trolling and drifting with rod and reel. The tournament usually coincides with the **West End Carnaval**, which includes beauty queens, parades, food, music, and street parties lasting into the wee hours.

Roatán Dive Sites



1. West End Wall
2. Black Rock
3. Mandy's Eel Garden
4. Turtle Crossing
5. Lighthouse Reef
6. Half Moon Bay Wall
7. Dive Master's Choice
8. Hole in the Wall
9. Canyon Reef
10. Fish Den
11. Peter's Place
12. Bear's Den
13. Blue Channel
14. El Aguila
15. Herbie's Place
16. Pablo's Place
17. Insidious Reef, Enchanted Forest
18. Connie's Dream
19. Mary's Place
20. *Prince Albert* wreck
21. Inside-Outside
22. South Shore Chimneys
23. Calvin's Crack

NOT TO SCALE

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Festivities celebrating **Independence Day**, September 15, take place throughout the month of September with parties scheduled in different locations.

The **Wild and Free Marathon**, an annual fundraiser for the preservation of the Island's yellow-nape parrot, takes place in September at Palmetto Bay. 5 k run and 1 k walk, live Island music and children's activities.

November **Pirate's Day** celebration in West End daytime activities include food and drinks, a free children's lunch, as well as swimming, costume, and kayaking contests. Adult party in the evening offers more food, drinks, and live music.

Adventures on Water

Diving

Over 100 dive sites in Roatán provide divers and snorkelers with a multitude of spectacular dive sites ranging from caves, canyons, crevices, drop-offs, and swim-throughs. Within the West End Marine Reserve alone there are 38 sites. Go on a drift dive, shallow dive, deep dive, wall dive, wreck dive, cave dive, or night dive to observe hundreds of corals, fish, and other marine species. An estimated 90% of the marine life found in the Caribbean is present in the Bay Islands.

Roatán Reef Structure & Wall Diving

A barrier reef surrounds Roatán, which on average is 200-300 yards from the shore. The waves break on the reef, creating an inner lagoon or back reef, which is usually 15 to 30 feet deep with calm waters that are ideal for snorkeling and shallow diving. There is little reef exposure, even though the reef flat is usually only about a foot deep. The reef front generally slopes 30 to 50 feet before the 45° drop-off that reaches water depths of about 130 feet. Roatán is famous for these wall diving sites. Crevices, cracks, and caverns in the wall structure around the island and plenty of shallow areas for snorkeling and swimming provide fun for everyone.

Roatán Dive Sites

● Dive Sites off the Northern Shore of Roatán

West End Wall (drift dive, 40-120 feet). The southwest tip of Roatán offers a dramatic drift dive that takes you from a spectacular wall that plunges toward a deep blue abyss and then

leads out to a shallower plateau. Pillar corals, barrel sponges, azure vase sponges, giant sea anemones, tunicates, eagle rays, French angelfish, and large schools of jacks, yellowtail snappers, and ocean triggerfish inhabit this area. Current is a dive factor.

Black Rock (15-100 feet). A portion of iron shore extends out into the water. This is a great shallow dive from a 60-foot mooring to a vertical wall.

Mandy's Eel Garden (shore/boat dive, 20-80 feet). Named after the large number of garden eels inhabiting the area, which they share with schools of squid and octopus, this shallow dive is just off West Bay beach, making it perfect for scuba, snorkeling and shallow diving.

Turtle Crossing (40-150 feet). Turtles roam the shallows off this dive site out from the West End pass.

Lighthouse Reef (25-110 feet). Plateau and wall dive, with an abundance of sponges. Expect to see grouper, yellow snapper, butterfly fish, and maybe a turtle, an eagle or a moray eel.

Half Moon Bay Wall (drift dive, 20-130 feet). This is a nice shore dive down a semicircular wall that slopes from 20 to 60 feet and then drops to more than 100 feet. Large schools of barracuda and jackfish, as well as green moray eels, grouper, black durgon, blue angelfish, Creole wrasse, lobster, barrel and peacock flounders, scrawled filefish, and blennies can be seen among azure vase sponges, gorgonians, corals, sea fans, sponges, and orange elephant ear sponges.

Dive Master's Choice (40-130 feet). In front of the Seagrape Plantation, this site is easily accessible by boat or from the shore. The wall suddenly drops off from a gentle slope. Sergeant majors, parrotfish, red hinds, spotfin, butterfly fish, turtles, and eagle rays swim among giant sponges, sea anemones, and gorgonians.

Hole in the Wall (advanced divers, 45-135 feet). This is a deep dive through numerous caves and chutes. One hole in the wall leads into a chute at 45 feet that slopes outwards to exit on a 140-foot sheer cliff, where large grouper, barracuda, spotted rays and hawksbill turtles roam. Deeper still are large branches of black coral and pelagics.

Canyon Reef (10-155 feet). A beautiful shelf coral canyon made up of a series of ravines that host towers of pillar corals. Zigzag through tunnels starting at 10 feet and descending 60 feet to the wall exit, then up, and down again to shallow areas.

Fish Den (10 to 130 feet). A den of fishes? This site is popular because of the multitude of fish that inhabit the area. From 35 feet to 70 feet, a spectacular wall is full of barrel, sponges, tube sponges, gorgonians, and elephant ear sponges, and home to large schools of blue tangs, grunts, parrotfish, and yellowtail snappers. Fairy basslets, Creole wrasses, angelfish, triggerfish, blennies, trunkfish, and indigo hamlets, among other specie,s can also be seen.

Peter's Place (25 to 140 feet). Another popular site inhabited by lots of fish. The reef front drops sharply to about 120 feet and boasts an abundance of coral pillars, fan corals, and even black coral. Most notable is the mini-wall that rises from about 40 feet. Species encountered include turtles, spotted eagle rays, triggerfish, black durgon, sea fans, grouper, flounder, parrotfish, angelfish, tang, yellow snapper, sponges, spider crags, eels, brittle stars, basket stars, octopus, grouper, parrotfish, angelfish, tang, and yellow snapper – all out during the day. Take a night dive to observe eels, brittle stars, basket stars, octopus, and flounders.

Bear's Den (cave dive, 30-105 feet). Just west of Spooky Channel, this dive offers a large cave, a tunnel and wall. Swim through a 100-foot tunnel out to the wall and then up along the wall to the Bear's Den, which is a large 40-foot-deep cavern, inhabited by lobster, reef crabs, and glassy sweepers. Groupers are also numerous in this area.

Blue Channel (five-50 feet). Both snorkelers and divers will enjoy this site just 300 yards out from the Sueño Del Mar's beachfront in West End. The 10- to 45-foot-deep channel runs parallel to the shore. Swim-through crevices in the reef wall on the southern side allow you to swim among the schools of tangs, grunts, and snapper that hover in the area and to observe the groupers, pufferfish, and moray eels that live there.

El Aguila (deep-water wreck dive, 20-100 feet). Sunk in 1997, the wreck of the *Aguila* cargo boat, over 200 feet long, lies on the sandy bottom at 100 feet. You can easily swim through the holds and cabins, which are open and have been adapted for diving. Very close to the wreck is an eel garden. Finish off your dive swimming slowly up a nearby wall.

● Dive Sites off the Southern Shore of Roatán

Pablo's Place (drift dive, 40-180 feet). Sheer wall dive with overhangs rich in soft coral structures such as gorgonians and

sponges. Expect to see an abundance of marine life such as groupers, jacks, giant hermit crabs, lobsters, shrimp eagle rays, turtles, and gray, French, and queen angelfish.

Herbie's Place (drift dive, 20-150 feet). A drift dive along a wall hosting large barrel sponges, sea fans, gorgonians, and azure vase sponges. Abundant animal species including groupers, horse-eye jacks, barracuda, sharks, and turtles. Most dive masters will drop you off and you'll drift to the Pablo's Place site. Current is a dive factor.

Mary's Place (30 to 130 feet). A huge crack in the reef wall that is large enough to swim through has made Mary's Place one of the best-known dive spots in the Caribbean. *Scuba Diving* magazine featured it with a 2006 Reader's Choice Awards. This site has impressive overhangs that teem with colorful marine life, including an abundance of seahorses. The dive begins with a swim-through at 40 feet. Marvel at the sunlight that pours into the cut, lighting colorful soft corals along the way. There is more than one way out and as you descend, you'll see black coral, sponges, sea fans, jewfish, yellowtail snapper, seahorses, grouper, blue tangs, spotted eagle rays, silversides, and grouper. Outside on the wall are hard corals, delicate deepwater lace, and large grouper. Nurse sharks, lobsters, crabs and other crustaceans hang out along the bottom of the wall under ledges. Out from the wall, a sand shelf drops from 140 to 200 feet, offering a splendid view. You can only make one visit to this protected dive site, so plan accordingly.

Prince Albert (wreck dive, 45-65 feet). This is one of the best dives available for every level of diver. The wreck of the 140-foot tanker is at a depth of 60 feet and is easily accessible from either the shore or a boat. There is plenty to see both inside and outside of the wreck as the holds are open and the hull is intact. Photographers will enjoy this site because diverse growth covers the wreck and all kinds of colorful marine life inhabit every nook and cranny. Just 50 feet from the *Prince Albert* is the wreck of a DC-3. Although this wreck is not quite as distinguishable, the two wings and the fuselage can be clearly made out. Watch for the resident green moray as well as seahorses.

Inside-Outside (35-120 feet). This site is named for the numerous cracks and swim-throughs in the reef, which is covered with both hard and soft coral.

South-Shore Chimneys (15-130 feet). Two large chimneys rise from the depths, which support a wide array of vase sponges, fans, sponges, gorgonians. Grouper, turtles, and parrotfish are common in this area.

Insidious Reef and **Enchanted Forest** (30 to 130 feet). These two sites are on a sloping offshore bank. The Insidious Reef has depths ranging from 30 to 130 feet and is on the inner bank. The Enchanted Forest is on the reef crest and wall with depths from eight to 110 feet and has barrel and vase sponges as well as soft coral. You'll see French angelfish, manta rays, Creole wrasse groupers and maybe even a shark.

Connie's Dream (40-130 feet). This site is a lush drop-off hosting colorful sponges and wide crevices leading into the blue. You'll see green moray eels, parrotfish, angelfish, black seahorses, and rockfish.

Calvin's Crack (20-110 feet), west of the main Oak Ridge channel, is a crevice in the reef that slowly widens to an exit in the outer wall at 70 feet. Marine life you'll see include fan coral, angelfish, yellowtail, damselfish, toadfish, silversides, fairy basslets, barracuda, and green moray eels. This a favorite site among divers.

Dive Shops

Anthony's Key Resort, Sandy Bay, ☎ 445-3003, www.anthonyskey.com, akr@anthonyskey.com, in the US ☎ 954-929-0090 or ☎ 800-227-3483. The SCUBA School at Anthony's Key Resort (AKR) is a full-service PADI 5-Star Gold Palm Instructor Development Center, which offers a full range of scuba courses from Discover Scuba all the way to Instructor level. Open daily from 7:30 am to 4 pm. AKR guests are given priority. Dive package rates range from $600 to $1,000 a week, depending on season and accommodations. PADI courses offered include: Open Water Certification ($375), Open Water Referral ($185), Advanced Open Water Certification ($205), Rescue Diver ($315), Enriched Air Course ($185), Emergency First Response ($80), Divemaster ($600), Adventure Diver ($135). A wide variety of specialty courses, such as night diving and wreck diving, are also available for $100-$200.

Bananarama Diving Resort, West Bay, ☎ 403-8021, write on fax letter attn: Bananarama, www.bananaramadive.com. The Bananarama is an authorized Scuba Pro Diving Center and PADI Gold Palm Resort. PADI courses offered range from

Discover Scuba Intro Dive (Resort-No Certification) for $100, Open Water Diver Certification ($225), Advanced Open Water Certification ($265), Rescue Diver ($285), Enriched Air Course ($200), Emergency First Response ($125) to Dive Master Certification for $700. Fun dives are available from $30 a dive to $220 for a 10-dive fun dive package. Specialty courses are also offered for $75-$200.

Coconut Tree Divers, Half Moon Bay, West End, ☎ 445-4088, www.divingonroatan.com, coconuttreedivers@yahoo.com. This is a well-established and well-liked diveshop, with over 20 years of dive experience. The multi-lingual PADI staff provides Open Water ($280), Advanced Open Water ($280), Rescue Diver ($250) and Dive Master ($650), as well as numerous fun dives for prices as low as $15 if you have your own equipment. The shop offers four different dive sites a day to choose from, starting with a 9 am dive on the spacious dive boat *Bottom Time*, which leaves the dock for a two-tank dive at two different locations. Afternoon dives leave at 1 and 2:30 pm. Night dives available upon request. A minimum of four people are required.

Dockside Dive Center, Coco View Resort, ☎ 455-7505, www.docksidedivecenter.com, info@docksidedivecenter.com. This is a full-service 5-Star PADI dive store. Services include PADI dive courses, a full line of well-maintained rental gear, an equipment repair shop, and a retail store offering both dive-related accessories and souvenir items. Dive courses range from Discover Scuba Diving (Resort-No Certification) for $75, Open Water Diver ($380), Scuba Refresher ($50), Advanced Adventure Diver ($200), Emergency First Response ($125), Rescue Diver ($295) through Dive Master. Specialty ($500). Specialty courses include Enriched Air Diver-Nitrox ($125), Underwater Naturalist ($175), Underwater Photographer ($150), and more. Tim Blanton, whose video work has appeared on network TV, including the *Shark Week* series on Discovery Channel, runs the Independent Photo & Video Center at Dockside.

Native Sons, Chillie's Hotel, Half Moon Bay, West End, ☎ 445-4003, www.nativesonsroatan.com. They offer a full dive program, including PADI dive certifications from Open Water Diver for $250 through Dive Master for $600. Specialty courses include Deep Diver, Wreck Diver, Rescue Diver and First Aid, and Nitrox. They also have fun dives from $15 to $30.

Ocean Connections, West End, ☎ 961-3352, www.ocean-connections.com, info@ocean-connections.com. They have a full dive program with Nitrox and PADI dive certifications from Open Water and Junior Open Water ($220), Advanced Open Water and Junior Open Water ($180), Medic First Aid ($125), Rescue Diver ($250), Enriched Air ($150) to Dive Master ($600). Specialty courses include Nitrox, Wreck Diver, Deep Diver, Night Diver, AWARE Fish ID, Underwater Naturalist, Cavern Diving, and Photography from $125 to $175. There is a limit of six students per class. The shop also offers special five- and 11-day dive package rates. Snorkeling equipment can be rented by the half-day, day or week. Dive computers and underwater cameras are also available for shop customers. Scuba equipment rental is possible only for customers participating in scheduled center activities.

Octopus Dive School, Foster's Resort, ☎ 403-8071, info@octopusdiveschool.com, specializes in small groups, offering all PADI courses from Discover Scuba (Resort-No Certification) for $50, Open Water ($300), Advanced Open Water Certification ($240), Enriched Air ($220) Rescue Diver ($260), Emergency First Response ($100) to Dive Master ($650), and is an authorized Scuba Pro dealer. Trial dives and shallow water training take place in the calm waters of West Bay beach. Whole-day trips, sunrise and night dives can be organized upon request. Modern facilities feature the courses hall, equipment cleaning area, showers, DVD library, and technical repair workshop. For children, the school offers Snorkel Safari, Bubble-maker (eight years+), Open Water Junior (10 years+), weekly fish ID and Happenings. Courses are offered by qualified instructors who speak English, Spanish, Italian, German, and Danish. Fun dives are available from $30-$40 up to $90 for a fun shark dive. Fun dive packages are also available for $125 for five dives and $220 for 10 dives.

Reef Gliders, West End, www.reefgliders.com, admin@divebayislands.com. This is a PADI-authorized dive center. The shop offers three dives a day at 9 am, 11:30 am, and 2:30 pm. Qualified Dive Masters or Instructors act as guides on all dives; whenever possible, you'll form part of a group with similar dive experience. The shop has two boats and offers the following PADI courses: Scuba Diver ($150), Discover Scuba Diving ($75), Scuba Review ($35), Open Water Referral, Open Water ($230), Advanced Open Water ($220), Rescue Diver ($230), Emergency First Response ($85), Enriched Air ($125),

and Dive Master ($600). The diving program includes specialty courses at $125-$175, shark and dolphin dives ($75), a one-tank dive ($30), a two-tank dive ($50), a night dive ($35), and five- ($115) and 10-dive ($200) packages.

Sueño Del Mar Dive Center, West End, ☎ 403-8817, www.suenodelmar.com. This is in a wooden building at the end of a dock over the water in West End and downstairs from Eagle Ray's Restaurant. Recently rated the best dive shop in Roatán by readers of Rodale's *Scuba Diving Magazine*, it offers a complete range of diving options. The shop provides PADI diving lessons and certifications, from Open Water Diver Certification for $280.00 (includes four nights of accommodations) through Dive Master ($600) and a full range of diving expeditions for certified divers, visiting 20 different sites over the course of seven days. Three boats depart daily, and night dives are available with prior arrangement. Specialty trips to Roatán sites outside the Marine Park, as well as to Cayos Cochinos (Hog Cays), Barbareta and the tiny island of Helene. Services provided for small groups of cruise ship passengers include customized diving, snorkeling, and kayaking trips for $50 to $90, including transfer to and from ship and related taxes.

Tyll's Dive, West End, ☎ 455-5322, www.tyllsdive.com, info@tyllsdive.com. The shop has two boats and a multilingual staff. Departure times are adjustable in accord with the customer's needs. The shop offers dive packages at $31 for one dive to $26 to five dives and $21 for 10 dives, as well as SSI diving instruction. Courses include Economy Open Water Diver ($225), Deluxe Open Water Diver ($325), Advanced Open Water ($225), Stress & Rescue ($250), Dive Control Specialist ($600), SSI Open Water Dive Instructor ($1,600), Open Water Referral ($200), Refresh Course ($75), Experience SCUBA ($75), and Open Water Diver with Home Study Kit (shipped to you) ($350). The dive package includes tanks, weights, boat, and guiding through reefs, wall, caves, tunnels, and wrecks. There are special rates for groups of 10 or more. The price includes guiding (in different languages), tanks, weights, boat, and entrance fee for the Marine Reserve.

West End Divers, West End, www.westenddivers.com. This is an authorized PADI dive center providing full certification courses in several languages, as well as daily fun dives. Courses include Scuba Discovery ($75), Open Water

($200-$250), Advanced Open Water ($200), Medic First Aid, Rescue Diver ($250-$300), and Dive Master. The diving program has three daily dives at 9 am, 11:30 and 2:30 pm plus night dives. Single dives ($35), five-dive ($25 a dive) and 10-dive ($20 a dive) packages are available, as is snorkel equipment rental. Facilities include restaurant and coffee shop.

Wet 'n Wild Dive Center, West Bay, ☎ 403-8046, www.lasrocasresort.com, info@lasrocasresort.com. An authorized PADI Diving Center at Las Rocas Resort, which offers fun dives from $30-$40, five-dive packages for $125, 10-dive packages for $220 and 15-dive packages for $300; snorkeling trips ($15-20); and dive courses including Bubblemaker course for kids in shallow water ($50), Discover Scuba Diving ($100), Open Water Diver ($300), Advanced Open Water ($240), Rescue Diver ($260), Emergency First Response ($100) through a Dive Master ($800).

Snorkeling

Join one of the dive boats for a look at deeper reef systems. You can also rent snorkeling gear from one of the dive shops and explore on your own the fringe reef that typically drops off about 150 yards from shore. **Sundowners** rents equipment and is right on the beach in Half Moon Bay, West End.

Sailing, Fishing & Island Boat Tours

Hook 'em Up with Captain "O", West End, ☎ 445-1616, 966-4714, www.westendroatan.com/hookup.htm. Native West Ender, Captain Orville Miller offers fishing charters, including equipment, at rates of $45 to $60 an hour; $225 to $275 for a half-day; and $250 to $325 for a full day. Snorkeling Adventures are offered for $20 an hour plus $5 for snorkel equipment (up to four persons). Islands tours cost about $300 depending on logistics and include visits to different communities and through the mangroves as well as snorkeling. Captain "O" is on VHF Channel #16.

Roatán Scenic and Snorkeling Boat Tour, Roatán Sales and Rentals, West End, ☎ 445-117, www.roatansalesandrentals.com/marco-and-carlos-fishing.htm. This four to five hour scenic boat tour includes a ride by the Crawfish Rock Wreck and through mangrove tunnels, snorkeling in remote places, and a visit to the north shore beaches near Palmetto Bay. The rate is $50 per person for a maximum of six people and includes cold refreshments (water, sodas, and beer) and a

light lunch or snacks. Snorkeling gear available for rent or bring your own.

Fishing

Fishing is a popular sport on Roatán and you can go either fly-fishing or deep-sea fishing for a large variety of fish species. Reef fishes often caught include snapper, grouper, barracuda, tuna, yellow tail snapper, and jacks. Fish the flats for bonefish, permit, and tarpon. Depending on the season, in deeper waters blue and white marlin, sailfish, wahoo, mahi mahi, king fish, bonito, barracuda, dorado, black-fin tuna, yellow-fin tuna, king mackerel and shark are often caught.

Marco & Carlos Fishing Charters, West End, www.roatansalesandrentals.com, ☎ 445-1171, is at Roatán Sales and Rentals. Marco and Carlos, native islanders, will take you bottom fishing near the reefs or deep-sea fishing. Charters include dock pick-up and drop-off from West End or West Bay, fishing gear, bait/lures, beer, soda, and water. Bring your snorkel gear or they can rent you some for a refreshing dip by the reef. Rates are $300 for half a day and $550 for a full day with one to four persons.

Tropical Beach Resort, East End, ☎ 435-2725, www.bayislandtropicalbeachresort.com, rodjean123@yahoo.com, offers flat fishing charters for the day at $165; deep sea fishing charters at $300 for half a day and $480 for a full day, with lunch and drinks. Longer charters also available plus all-inclusive fish packages (see page 233).

The Lodge at Mango Creek in Port Royal is a dedicated fly-fishing lodge with various packages (see page 236).

Glass Bottom Boats

Underwater Paradise, Half Moon Bay Resort, offers one-hour glass-bottomed boat tours for US$18 per person.

The ***Coral Reef Explorer***, West Bay Beach, www.roatan-coralreefexplorer.com, has daily tours at 11 am, 12:30, and 2 pm, taking approximately 45 minutes. Tickets are for sale right on the dock. Most hotels can sell you a ticket; ask at reception. Service closed on Mondays except on holidays, cruise ship days, or for private tours by appointment.

Kayaking

Many of the hotels provide complimentary kayak use. You can also rent a kayak for a half-day or a full day from many of the dive shops. **Subway Watersports** in Brick Bay offers a kayaking day-trip (six-seven hours) led by a guide along the north shore of Roatán. Rates include drinks, snacks, and lunch as well as snorkeling gear. The price is $80 per person with a minimum of two people. The **Sea Breeze Inn**, close to the West End entrance road, offers single and double kayaks; expect to pay around US$12 for a half-day or US$20 for a full day.

Adventure in a Yellow Submarine

Stanley Submersibles, Half Moon Bay Cabins, www.stanleysubmarines.com, ☎ 445-5478. For a unique experience, plunge to the depths in the *Idabel* for a view of seldom-seen and mysterious marine life that live in near darkness. Rates begin at $500 for a two-hour, two-person tour.

Swim with the Dolphins

The **Roatán Institute of Marine Sciences** does tropical marine ecosystems research, educational programs and offers dolphin shows Monday to Friday at 10:30 am and 4:30 pm and on Saturday and Sunday at 10:30 am, 1:30 pm, and 4:30 pm. Admission is $4. There are also opportunities to interact with the dolphins. Swim with the dolphins for $84 or become a trainer for the day for $202; reservations are required.

Adventures on Land

Keifitos, between West End and West Bay, www.keifitos.com, has nice horses and offers a 1½-hour guided ride along the beach and farther inland for $25.

Carambola Botanical Gardens, Sandy Bay. Two nature trails run through the gardens, which feature dozens of tropical plant species. A few of them have identification signs. The uphill path leads to the top of the mountain for an expansive view of the north shore and the island of Utila in the distance. On your way up you'll go by Iguana Wall where iguanas and parrots breed. The jungle path leads through flatter terrain sporting lush tropical growth. Open daily from 8 am to 5 pm. Admission is $5.

Dolphins & History: The **Roatán Museum** and the **Roatán Institute of Marine Sciences** are both at Anthony's Key Resort, ☎ 445-3003, in Sandy Bay. The museum has a small archaeological exhibit of indigenous artifacts and Bay Island historical information. Open from Thursday to Tuesday 8 am to 5pm. The entrance fee is $5.

Gumbalimba Park, in West Bay, www.gumbalimbapark.com, tabyana@hondusoft.com, offers water activities and beach activities as well as diverse attractions on its more than 40 acres. The park features an animal preserve with jump-on-your-shoulders monkeys, free-flying exotic birds, friendly turkeys, baby water buffalos, and other native animals. The botanical gardens boast over 200 colorful plant and tree species, numerous waterfalls and fountains, and a picturesque hanging bridge over the fishing pond. A convenient water activities cabana is right on the beach, offering scuba, snorkeling, and kayaking. Horseback riding and canopy tours are also available. Other amenities include Coxen's Cave gift shop and a lobster buffet restaurant on the beach with maypole dance entertainment.

Marble Hill Farm, northeast shore, marblehillfarms@hotmail.com, is owned by Brian and Lisa who produce homemade tropical jams, jellies, sauces, and chutneys. The ingredients, which include hibiscus flowers, mangos, pineapples, guavas, mutton peppers, and island plums, are grown, processed, and bottled at the farm. Lisa also has a batik studio with unique clothing and wall hangings for sale. Relax on her ocean-view porch with nearby hummingbird feeders while you sample the food products. You're sure to buy more than one product.

Roatán's Butterfly Garden, gibraltar@globalnet.hn, is a five-minute walk from the main entrance to West End Village, or you can have your taxi driver stop on your way into town. See and learn about some of Honduras' most colorful butterflies, such as common owl, zebra, helicopter, firecracker, Julia's, sunset longwing, monarch, and queen. You can either

join a guided tour (about an hour) or explore the park on your own. Garden and Gift Shop open from Sunday to Friday 9 am to 5 pm. Admission is $5 for adults and $3 for children under 10 years.

Roatán's Zip Line Canopy Tour at the Gumbalimba Park offers 11 platforms with spectacular views and a close-up view of forest canopy from two West Bay locations for $35 per person. Open daily from 9 am to 5 pm, the cost for all day includes both locations, rides and all equipment necessary.

Free Adventures

The **West End Village** is the most popular traveler's destination on Roatán, offering plenty of nightlife, shopping, beach, and water fun. Snorkel out to the Blue Channel, a favorite dive site.

Swimming: Calm coastal waters offer great swimming and sunbathing opportunities throughout Roatán. Turquoise blue waters slap gently on white sand beaches in an idyllic setting.

Snorkeling: If you own a own mask and snorkel, swim 200 yards out to the beautiful fringe reef and observe the abundant and colorful marine life. During the morning and early afternoon, the ocean is usually calm and the added buoyancy of the salt water makes swimming seem effortless. It's a great way to get a wonderful tan. Just be sure to apply plenty of sunscreen so you tan instead of burn. Catch a glimpse of an eagle ray, a shy sea turtle, giant schools of colorful fish and even dolphins.

Where to Stay & Eat on Roatán

The wide array of lodging available on Roatán, which ranges from budget hotels, bed & breakfasts and dive resorts to vacation rentals and luxury hotels, can make your choice difficult. Anywhere you stay is sure to be fun! If your main objective is diving, many of the resorts offer dive packages at very reasonable prices. If you seek solitude, search for a hotel that is not in a town, most of which also provide special packages. If socializ-

ing is higher up on your agenda, the west side of the island definitely provides the most options. Lodging on the island ranges from basic inexpensive accommodations for around $10 a night to the luxurious and exclusive for more than $100 a night.

Area West of Coxen Hole

West End Village

The West End Village, about nine miles from Coxen Hole, is a small and laid-back Caribbean town nestled on the beach between small hills and the clear, blue ocean. Catering to the independent traveler, West End has restaurants, bars, nightlife, shopping, and accommodations to fit any budget and preference. Numerous dive shops offer diver certification courses taught in many different languages as well as dive trips to spectacular dive sights. On the eastern edge of West End lies Half Moon Bay, a beautiful tropical cove that is ideal for swimming. A mile and half west of West End you'll find West Bay, which boasts one of the most beautiful beaches found anywhere and a reef just 30 yards out.

HOTEL PRICE CHART

Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.

	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	US$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

Where to Stay

West End has a wide variety of lodgings. If you're on a tight budget, single rooms with a shared bath are available for under $10 a night. Moderately priced hotels have rooms with private baths, hot water, and a/c. Many places offer hotel and dive packages, or discount rates for longer rentals. Try to make reservations ahead of time, as many of the hotels are small and can fill up quickly.

● All-Inclusive

$$$$-$$$$$ **Inn of Last Resort**, Gibson Bight, ☎ 445-1903, toll-free in US ☎ 888-238-8266 or fax 214-722-0714,

www.innoflastresort.com, information@innoflastresort.com. Dive center, restaurant, bar, gift shop, satellite TV, board games, and a certified massage therapist. The Inn of Last Resort is a secluded all-inclusive dive resort on a hillside near West End, which blends harmoniously into the environment. Facilities consist of four wooden edifices built around the trees. All the accommodations are the same: spacious, air-conditioned rooms with phone, queen-size bed, two twin beds, private bath, hot water, ceiling fans, and a large closet. The lodge is a large open-air building that houses the restaurant, bar and sitting area. Although the menu is fixed, the food is very good and the restaurant will cater to your needs if you are a vegetarian or have dietary restrictions. Desserts are included. A long dock over the lagoon ends with a platform that offers both sun and shade. Steps from the dock allow easy access into clear, shallow water with excellent snorkeling. Ask about the dive and snorkel packages.

$$$-$$$$$ **Luna Beach Resort**, West End, ☎ 445-0009, www.lunabeachresort.com, tlc@globalnet.hn. A 10-minute walk from West End, the Luna Beach Resort's location is both beautiful and secluded. It's close enough to walk to where all the action takes place and far enough to be quiet at night. Situated on 15 acres, the Resort offers its own private beach, full-service restaurant and bar, in-ground swimming pool, dive shop, gift shop, and jungle walk trail. There is a variety of accommodations, including Beach Suites just a few feet from the water's edge. If you need more space, stay in one of the island-style Tropical Houses or a newly built 4,000-square-foot Premium House tucked away in the jungle with spectacular views of the ocean, which accommodates from six to eight people. Internet access and baby-sitting services are also available. The beach area is equipped with lounge chairs, beach mats, and umbrellas. The restaurant is open from 8 am to 8 pm and offers a full menu as well as a children's menu for lunch and dinner. Full-service bar and a game room with a bar have satellite TV and a daily happy hour. The full-service dive shop conducts PADI and SSI dive courses as well as fun dives and snorkeling. Rates based on double occupancy vary in accordance with accommodation. A great place for families or groups.

$$ **Pura Vida Resort**, ☎ 403-8798, www.puravidaresort.com, info@puravidaresort.com. Pura Vida is a Mediterranean-style hotel in the middle of West End Beach on the waterfront. The hotel offers 18 ample and comfortable rooms, an Italian restaurant, and a fully equipped PADI dive center. The whole set up is clean and well maintained. Most of the 18 rooms are facing the ocean and all offer private bathrooms, hot water, fan, a/c, cable TV, wireless Internet, and daily house cleaning services. Other services include laundry, telephone/fax, safe box, and massage. The hotel's gourmet Pizzeria and Restaurant specializes in fresh seafood, international and Italian cuisine and homemade pastas. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Meal packages are also available. The Resort's PADI Dive Center has three boats and conducts numerous dive courses for adults, children, fun dives, snorkeling, and special services for cruise ship divers. Diving and non-diving packages also available.

● Expensive

$$$$ **Beach House at Half Moon Bay**, Half Moon Bay, ☎ 445-0339, beachhouse@globalnet.hn. The Beach House is a small luxury hotel offering three elegant suites decorated with local and Honduran antiques and with decks overlooking the beach and sea. Suite A is two stories, sleeps four, has a full kitchen and private sun deck and rents for $200 a night. Suites B and C sleep four, have a refrigerator, and coffee pot for $150 a night. Amenities include welcome drinks and snacks, queen-size beds with overstuffed mattresses, daily housecleaning service, cable TV, and DVD players, downstairs Pizza'n Snacks Internet Café. Laundry, telephone, and fax services are also available to guests.

● Moderate

$-$$ **Casa Calico**, West End, ☎ 403-8730, in the US ☎ 978-373-4133, or toll free in the US and Canada ☎ 1-866-476-2826, www.casacalico.com, casacalico@aol.com. Casa Calico offers standard or large rooms with daily housecleaning. Both have a/c and fan, private bath, hot water and the large rooms include kitchenette and sleep up to five people. The hotel is in a quiet area, set in a garden and overlooking the ocean. There is a restaurant/bar on premises and

complimentary wireless Internet and use of kayaks. Other services include babysitting and airport transfers. The restaurant serves breakfast from Tuesday to Sunday from 7:30 am to 12 pm.

$$ **Coconut Tree Cabins**, ☎ 445-4088, www.westbaycoconuttree.com, is at the entrance to West End and within feet of the beach shoreline at picturesque Half Moon Bay. Accommodations include single and double rooms, and two- and three-bedroom cabins with fully equipped kitchens. The cabins are clean, comfortable, and well maintained. Large windows provide good lighting accented by white tile floors and sliding glass doors leading to small decks with hammocks.

$$ **Georphi's Tropical Hideaway**, West End, ☎ 403-8762, in the US 508-854-1356, www.roatangeorphis.com, georphi@yahoo.com. Georphi's Tropical is conveniently situated on the main road in West End. Rudy, the owner, is famous for his delicious island breakfasts, banana pancakes, smoothies and his wonderful personality. Accommodations include nine large cabins with fans, private bath, hot water, and decks. Two cabins have a/c. Restaurant and bar on premises.

$$ **Half Moon Bay Cabins**, ☎ 445-4007, in the US 813-920-0212, toll-free in the US 800-989-9970, www.halfmoonbaycabins.com, reservations@halfmoonbaycabins.com. There are 14 cabins, each with a porch and hammock. Ten cabins come with a/c and four with fans. Ten cabins have two double beds and four cabins contain three double beds. All the cabins have private baths, hot water, and daily housecleaning service. Other amenities include a floating dock near the hotel shore and complimentary snorkel gear and kayaks. The hotel restaurant offers breakfast, lunch and dinner and has a nice outdoor deck area with a view of the ocean. A varied menu includes fresh seafood, steaks, pastas, and fruit. Full-service bar features a game room and a television.

$-$$ **Keifito's Plantation Resort**, West End. www.keifitos.com, keifitos@yahoo.com. This is between West End and West Bay. The easiest and least expensive way to get there is to take a $1 water taxi ride from West End. Ten

wooden cabins sit beneath the palms and have large windows with screens and wooden louvres to let the breeze in from all directions. Two rooms have private kitchens and a/c. From 7:30 to 11:30 am, there is coffee and a buffet of fresh fruit picked at the plantation. You can also use the hotel's spacious kitchen to cook your own meals. Secluded from the bustle of West End, there are plenty of hammocks, porches, and sundecks to laze about on. You can snorkel right from the beach in front of the hotel, which has deep water for swimming, and a shallow reef for snorkeling. Horseback riding is also available.

$$ **Kijo Bed & Breakfast**, Halfmoon Bay, no phone, kijoresort@yahoo.com, www.kijoresort.com, is in a quiet, secluded area on the water at Mangrove Bight, which is just a 10-minute walk to West End Village. This small hotel has a lovely beachfront setting with beautifully maintained garden and a private dock. The bottom floor has one large bedroom with a queen-size bed and another large bedroom, with two twin beds and a futon couch. These two rooms share a bathroom with shower. Private deck areas with hammocks face the ocean. A continental breakfast is served on the deck, there is bottled water in every room, and there are laundry facilities. Rates are $500 a week for double occupancy, $750 a week for three or four people and $1,000 a week for five or six people. Optional a/c, lunch, and dinner are available. Additional services include island tours by boat or car, snorkeling and fishing trips and a boat taxi to West End and West Bay.

$$-$$$ **Lost Paradise Cabins**, West End, ☎ 445-4210, www.lost-paradise.com, paradise@hn2.com. These 18 wood cabins are on three acres of beachfront in West End. Hang out on the hotel's over-the-water gazebo or go snorkeling from right in front of the hotel. Each has a/c, mini-refrigerator, ceiling fan, private bath, hot water, one queen or two double beds; maximum occupancy is four people per cabin. Complimentary airport transfers. Additional services include daily housecleaning, laundry, phone, fax, and Internet. The restaurant offers an international menu and full-service bar.

$$ **Mariposa Lodge**, ☎ 403-8728, www.mariposa-lodge.com, mariposalodge@yahoo.com. The recently renovated Lodge is nestled on a knoll amidst tropical gardens about 100 yards

from the beach in the heart of West End. All units face the ocean and spacious decks with an ocean view are perfect for enjoying tropical breezes from a hammock. All the rooms are equipped with ceiling fans and large slatted windows bring in the cooler night breezes. Each apartment can accommodate three or more guests and includes a fully equipped kitchen. Healing Hands Massage providing Shiatsu and European massage is available on site.

$$ **Mermaid Beach Cabins**, West End, ☎ 445-1335, in the US ☎ 970-204-1921, www.roatanet.com/mermaid. The 10 cabins come with two double beds, private bath, hot water, covered verandahs with hammocks, and refrigerator. Two rooms have a/c. There is free airport transfer, private beach, volleyball, central garden patio, and beachside seafood Barbecue, laundry and fax/phone services are also available. The Native Son's dive shop is also on the premises, right on the beach.

$-$$ **Posada Arco Iris**, Half Moon Bay, ☎ 455-1264, www.roatanposada.com, posadaarcoiris@globalnet.hn. Cozy Caribbean-style apartments, studios, and rooms with wooden floors and window frames tastefully furnished with handmade furniture and decorated with folk art. Accommodations include private bath, hot water, optional a/c, private porch with hammock, and breathtaking views of the ocean. Fishing trips on request. Inquire about weekly rates. Highly recommended.

$ **Roatán Bed & Breakfast** is up the hill behind the Brick Oven Pizza in West End. ☎ 991-2690, roatan_brb@yahoo.com. They offer a large bedroom with double bed and private bath, hot water, a/c, fan, and an ocean view from your room. Rooftop terrace/solarium provides a spectacular panoramic view of the ocean and surrounding area. They can make arrangements with dive centers and for airport transfers.

$-$$ **Sea Breeze Inn**, ☎/fax 445-0020, www.seabreeze-roatan.com, seabreeze@hondusoft.com. The Sea Breeze has eight units including two one-bedroom suites, two studios, and four single rooms with private bath, hot water, optional a/c. Package hotel and dive rates offered. Phone and fax services, laundry, dive course discounts, kayak rental, and snorkel equipment rental.

$-$$ **Seagrape Plantation Resort**, West End, www.seagraperoatan.com, ☎ 445-1428, 445-4428. The resort is on a small peninsula surrounded by beautiful coral that juts out of the sea. Steps leading into the sea provide amazing snorkeling and diving right off the shoreline. The sandy beach of Half Moon Bay is just a five-minute walk away. The hotel has 16 ocean-front cottages with a/c, fans, mini-fridge, private bath, hot water, cable TV, and balconies with hammocks facing the ocean. Spacious rooms provide the same amenities minus the balconies. Budget rooms are clean, comfortable and come with fans, shared bath, hot water, kitchen, and porch with hammock. Additional services include telephone/fax, diving arrangements, e-mail, car rentals, taxi service, sightseeing tours, fishing trips, laundry, safe, and money exchange.

● **Budget**

$ **Pinocchio's**, ☎ 960-3052, ☎/fax 445-1466, 445-4500, www.roatanpinocchios.com, info@roatanpinocchios.com. This small hotel has four clean and comfortable rooms, which can accommodate up to four people each. Each room has a ceiling fan, hot water and a large deck with a view of the ocean. Downstairs restaurant offers a great international menu featuring seafood platters, as well as a wide choice of vegetarian fare, including delicious crêpes. Also serves exotic cocktails. Recommended.

Chillies, ☎ 445-5365, 445-4003, www.nativesonsroatan.com/chillies.htm. On-the-beach budget lodging, includes rooms in the main house or cute garden cabins with shared bath and kitchen facilities for $18 and $22 respectively. Private cabins with bath, bedroom and porch cost $25. Native Son's dive shop is on the property. Reservations not made.

Valerie's Youth Hostel, www.roatanonline.com/valeries. Valerie's is in the heart of West End Village, behind Tyll's Dive about 35 yards from the beach. 30 dormitory beds cost $5 a night each, 10 private rooms cost $10 or $15 a night. There are large covered decks with hammocks. All beds have mosquito nets, full kitchen use for guests, washtubs for laundry and laundry service, low-cost meals and drinks. Bar with satellite TV. Reservations not made.

● Rentals

The Wood House, West End, www.roatanet.com/woodhouse. This unique home is actually comprised of three separate natural wooden structures all interconnected by decking. The main structure houses a fully equipped modern kitchen. Across from the kitchen is the second bedroom with a full-size bed. The master bedroom is in the third structure and has a king-sized bed, tiled floor, skylights and ceiling fan. Walk out the door and step across the deck to the covered veranda. The rental includes linens and beach towels if you request them. There is also a full bath with a tiled shower and an opaque glass block wall. Look through the plexi-glass ceiling while showering and admire the stars. You'll find comfortable Honduran furniture and hammocks for your relaxation. There are ceiling fans and skylights too. A six-foot-high wooden fence providing both privacy and security surrounds the house and yard. There are concrete walkways and pathways that meander through the garden, plus a picnic table. Rates vary from $500 to $700 a week depending on season.

Where to Eat

Eating is good on Roatán and it's easy to find a great meal. A gigantic fishing fleet provides fresh fish, shrimp, lobster, and other seafood on a daily basis and two shipping companies import meat and poultry products from the US weekly. International and local chefs offer specialty meat and seafood platters with island, Italian, Argentinean, Thai, US and even Vietnamese cuisine. Most restaurants serve ice-cold Honduran beer as well as assorted fresh fruit juices, blends, and soft drinks. Many have full bars.

$$-$$$ **Argentinean Grill**, ☎ 445-4264, is on the beach in front of the Posada Arco Iris in Half Moon Bay West End. Delicious Argentinean-style fare at affordable prices has made this establishment one of the island's most popular restaurants.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.	
$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

The menu includes a wide range of appetizers, grilled seafood, beef, and chicken entrées, fresh salads, red and white wine, plus full international bar service. Follow your meal with a dessert such as chocolate cake with Bailey's and Kailua sauce. The restaurant's open-air deck faces the palm-lined sandy beach. The relaxed and comfortable environment is a perfect place to enjoy your meal and to watch the sunset. Open from Wednesday to Monday 7 am to 9:30 pm. Best value.

$$ **Bertie's Creole Cuisine**, ☎ 445-4088, is in West End overlooking the sandy beaches of Half Moon Bay and the ocean from the second floor of the Coconut Tree Supermarket and Dive Center. Bertie is famous for his Creole-style island cooking and serves fresh seafood entrées, first-class beef sandwiches, burgers and much more. The full international bar offers cool refreshments, mixed drinks and even a sunset cocktail. The prices, service, and great food will make your meal both memorable and enjoyable.

$-$$ **Brick Oven Pizza** is up the hill from the main road. Look for the signs. They serve excellent pizza and other Italian dishes such as vegetarian lasagna and egg parmesan. They also offer baked seafood platters. Free movies nightly at 5 and 7 pm. Open daily 5 pm-10 pm.

$ **Casa Calico Restaurant** is open for breakfast from Tuesday to Sunday, 7:30 am to 12 pm. This restaurant is the favorite breakfast spot of many local residents. Best value.

$-$$ **Cannibal Café**, in front of Sea Breeze Inn. This restaurant has Mexican food such as chicken quesadillas, and island-style food on an upper deck with great views of the ocean. Specialties include Kevin's Big Kahuma Burrito made with fish, chicken, or steak. Open 10:30 am to 10 pm. Closed Sunday and Tuesday.

$$ **Cindy's Fish & Pasta** is across from the Sueño Del Mar Dive Shop on the West End Road heading west. Cindy's offers very inexpensive, well-prepared Honduran-style and seafood dishes. Wednesday for dinner, she offers an "All You Can Eat Lobster Special." Best value.

$$$ **Dian's Garden of Eat'in**. Offers seafood and chicken prepared island-style with an Asian twist. Try some of her

shrimp in spicy red coconut curry or cashew chicken stir fry served with salad, garlic bread, house rice, and vegetables. Great desserts include Roatán lime pie and brownies with pecans. Choose between air-conditioned indoor and outdoor garden settings. Seating is limited, but you can make reservations. Open from Monday to Saturday 5 to 9 pm. Best value.

$$$ **Eagle Ray's Bar & Grill** is on the second floor deck of the Sueño del Mar's dive shop over the water. Try their fish n' chips with a cold beer as you watch the sunset. Happy hour for beer and rum cola from 4 to 6 pm. Open daily from 10 am to 10 pm.

$$-$$$ **Foster's Waterfront Bar and Grill** is a double-deck restaurant built over the water offering a great place to watch Roatán's spectacular sunsets. International and island cuisine is offered on the lunch and dinner menus, as well as ice-cold beer.

$$-$$$ **Half Moon Bay Fish & Pasta**, Half Moon Bay. The favorite of many, the Half Moon Bay Fish & Pasta Restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Offers full bar service and continental cuisine on a deck over the beach with a great ocean view. Entrées include coconut shrimp, grouper, lobster, chicken, and pasta dishes.

$ **La Boulangerie Sandwiches & Croissants**. This is a French bakery with an ocean view. It offers good pastries such as cinnamon rolls, peach tarts, fruit plates, chocolate croissants, as well as ham and cheese, and vegetarian sandwiches on freshly baked bread, which you can accompany with a fresh fruit shake. Probably the best place for breakfast and sandwiches. Closed Sundays. The reasonable prices for the good food make this one of the best values in the West End.

$$$$ **Les Boucaniers**. The only French restaurant on Roatán, which is next door to Lost Paradise Inn, serves haute cuisine accompanied by an ample choice of French wines. The menu in several languages serves such appetizers as fois gras or French onion soup accompanied with delicious homemade sourdough bread. American tastes are also catered to with cheeseburgers and chicken club sandwiches. Entrées include such extravaganzas as lobster tail flambé with vanilla rum, jumbo shrimp Provençal-style and beef tenderloin flambé

with cognac, which are prepared to perfection and well worth the price. A wide choice of desserts is also offered. Open from Monday to Saturday 9 am to 10 pm.

$$$ **Montevideo Grill**, ☎ 403-8762, 403-8739, 445-1205, is at Georphi's Tropical Hideaway in West End. Uruguayan owners offer specialty steak platters. Try the steak stuffed with olives and cheese served with your choice of two salads. Full bar serves good mixed drinks.

$ **Lighthouse Island Seafood**, on the "Point," the peninsula between Half Moon Bay and West End Beach The Lighthouse offers island-style seafood and vegetarian dishes, homemade bread, and good desserts. The favorite dishes of many people are the fish sandwich and tacos made with grilled fish. Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Best value.

$-$$ **Luna Beach International Cuisine**. This popular restaurant serves Honduran and US-style seafood and meat platters, grade "A" beef and is open from 8 am to 8 pm daily. Saturday night jam sessions.

$ **Mango Verde** is a restaurant/bar serving simple salads, sandwiches, hamburgers, and daily specials. It also offers vegetarian fare and delicious whole wheat bread. Relaxed atmosphere, slow service, Internet.

$-$$ **Pinocchio's Italian & Vegetarian**. Pinocchio's offers seafood entrées, including its famous pasta with lobster and gorgonzola sauce, and good vegetarian platters such as quiche, crêpe desserts, as well as tropical cocktails. Closed Wednesdays. Recommended.

$-$$ **Pizza'n Snacks Internet Café**, below the Beach House, offers Italian fare such as pizzas and calzones.

$$-$$$ **Pura Vida**. This restaurant is on a large open deck facing the ocean from where you can enjoy the fabulous Caribbean sunset in a cozy atmosphere. Offers full menu including exciting seafood platters such as the "King Crab Platter," Italian dishes, pizza and desserts. Open daily 7 am to 9:30 pm for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

$$-$$$ **Roatán Rick's Restaurant & Bar** in West End, ☎ 403-8237, is on the second floor of the West End Divers. An international menu with Caribbean, US, Italian and Tex-Mex platters including burgers, fajitas, barbecue baby-back ribs,

steaks, shrimp, and lobster. Full-service bar with daily happy hour from 4 to 6 pm and sports TV.

$ **Rotisseria Alemana** in West End serves a delicious quarter of rotisserie-cooked chicken accompanied by ample servings of potato salad and coleslaw for Lps. 60 plus a soda for an additional Lps. 10.

$ **Rudy's Coffee Shop**, Georphi's Tropical Hideaway Hotel. Very popular breakfast place serving banana pancakes, French toast, omelets, and fruit smoothies. Lunch menu features island cuisine. Open for breakfast and lunch.

$$-$$$ **Sundowner**, Halfmoon Bay, www.roatanonline.com/sundowner, loafer@globalnet.hn. Spend your day relaxing at Sundowner right on West End's most beautiful white sandy beach. Charming beachfront bar/restaurant, serving barbecues, steak 'n lobster, soft drinks, the coldest beer, and great exotic cocktails. Enjoy your meal at a shaded picnic table just a few feet from the sea. Snorkeling, swimming, and kayaking. Happy hour 4-7 pm.

$-$$ **Velva Island Cuisine**. Velva has island-style seafood platters at very moderate prices. Closed Sunday.

$$-$$$ **West End Divers Coffee Shop** serves fresh coffee, cappuccino, and espressos as well as a variety of healthy fresh food including all-day breakfast, deli-style sandwiches, light lunches, smoothies, and their specialty – fruit juices. The Coffee Shop also has a well stocked bar and sells imported cheeses, wine, and Honduran cigars. Open daily from 8 am to 10 pm.

Nightlife

West End probably has some of the liveliest you'll find in Honduras. Bars, dancing and live music is usually available in any one of the locales.

● West End Bars

Both the **Sundowner** and **Rick's Bar and Grill** (both listed above) are nice places with views to enjoy an early evening beer or drink. These two are favorites of local expats.

The Twisted Toucan is on the main road in West End and has the reputation as the wildest bar in West End. The cheap

drinks, loud music, and spontaneous dancing create a relaxed atmosphere that can be fun. Open until around midnight.

The Black Pearl is a late night drinking hole. This is the place to go when the other bars close. The Black Pearl is on the beach near the Luna Beach Resort. Sometimes there is live music on the weekends at this bar, which closes around 3 pm.

West Bay Beach

West Bay Beach is one of Honduras' most spectacular beaches where crystal-clear turquoise blue waters gently roll up palm shaded white sands. on the western tip of Roatán about a mile and half west from West End you can either take a leisurely 45-minute walk to West Bay or catch one of the regular water taxis that are available from Foster's West End for about $1. You can also drive on the road that heads west out of West End. Forming part of the marine reserve park, this beach offers superb swimming, sunbathing, snorkeling, scuba diving, snuba diving, kayaking, and quite a few great places to stay.

Where to Stay

- **All-Inclusive**

$$$ **Bananarama Diving Resort**, West Bay, ☎ 403-8021, 992-9679, fax 445-1394, write on fax letter attn: Bananarama, www.bananarama-dive.com. On the beach, this resort offers spacious and clean cabins and suites, nestled in a garden, for four or more people, with a/c, ceiling fans, mosquito nets, daily house cleaning, microwaves, refrigerators, and cable TV/VCR. For smaller groups and couples there are one-bedroom suites with queen bed, living area with sofa bed, cable TV/VCR, kitchenette, and a/c. Rates based on double occupancy, but can vary according to number of people and total about US$90 a day for quad occupancy. Price includes full breakfast, kayaks, mountain bikes, and beach games. Check out their Internet Specials! The Bananarama is a PADI Gold Palm Resort. Single dives including Nitrox, dolphin diving and diving with sharks as well as dive and kayak packages are also available, as is onsite high-speed Internet.

$$-$$$ **Las Rocas Resort**, West Bay, ☎ 403-8046, fax 403-8047, US 1-877-379-8645, www.lasrocasresort.com, info@lasrocasresort.com. "Las Rocas" means "The Rocks," and this hotel is on the rocky, sandy end of West Bay Beach. Accommodations include one- and two-bedroom bungalows with private porches, complete with hammock and beautiful ocean view. The salt-water pool on the edge of the shore is a great place to hang out. All the bungalows have private bath, hot water, mini-bar, ceiling fans and a/c. Prices are per cabin and include airport transfers, daily continental breakfast served in your room and boat service at scheduled times. The on-premises dive shop Wet 'n Wild is an authorized PADI Diving Center with a full range of dive courses, trips, and dives. Dive packages are also available from about $400 to $800 depending on occupancy and season. Other activities include horseback riding, island tours, and deep-sea fishing. The hotel's restaurant is on the waterfront and a good place to watch the sunset. A perk of this hotel is their free water taxi to West End.

● Expensive

$$$-$$$$ **Mayan Princess**, West Bay, ☎ 403-8010/11, 967-1529, www.mayanprincess.com, reservations@mayanprincess.com. Luxury resort accommodations include one-bedroom beachfront suites, one- and two bedroom poolside suites, two-bedroom junior suite poolside, and two-bedroom master suite poolside. Villas can also be combined to provide two- and three-bedroom units. Amenities include a/c, spacious verandahs, cable TV, fully-equipped kitchens, room service, laundry facilities, wireless Internet, live entertainment (Sundays), airport transportation, tour desk, an awesome 250-foot blue lagoon swimming pool with waterfalls and swim-up bar, a new beachfront restaurant and complimentary use of kayaks. Snorkeling equipment rental, car rental, tours and babysitting are also available. This resort is definitely a fun place to stay, with the reef beginning just a few feet from the dazzling white sand beach. The Beach Bar is a full-service bar offering great cocktails and "island style" appetizers. The Beach Grill offers an international menu including seafood specialties, snacks and more for

breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Meal plans and special (weekday, honeymoon, and dive) packages are also available.

$$$$ **Island Pearl**, ☎ 978-6955, 403-8020, Canada office ☎ 514-289-9185, www.roatanpearl.com. This small resort offers four gorgeous luxury two-story villas. Two are right on the beach and the other two just a little farther back. Each two-bedroom villa is elegantly furnished, has a fully equipped kitchen, an upstairs balcony and downstairs porch and a hot tub. Activities include snorkeling (snorkel rental) and deep-sea fishing, at a cost of $20 per hour/per person.

$$$$$ **Paradise Beach Club**, ☎ 403-8040, in the US ☎ 1-800-291-0288, www.roatanvillas.com, info@roatanvillas.com. Amenities include swimming pool, restaurant and bar offering flexible meal plans and room service, beach bar, five-star PADI dive center, room service, Internet access, airport transfer, tours, free use of kayaks. This hotel is in the midst of extensive gardens. Very modern, well-appointed accommodations include air-conditioned villas, one-bedroom suites, penthouse suites, and hotel rooms. All the villas have two bedrooms, two baths, living room with sofa beds, and dining rooms, a fully equipped kitchen, cable TV and a furnished veranda. There are two types of villas, beachfront with private entrance to the beach or secluded in the tropical gardens of Paradise Beach Club. The suites feature a living/dining area, a fully equipped kitchen, veranda, and cable TV. The one-bedroom suites have one bathroom and a sofa bed in the living room and a maximum capacity of three guests. The three-bedroom penthouse suites have two bathrooms and two sofa beds in the living room with a maximum capacity of eight guests. The recently completed hotel rooms have either twin or king-size beds.

● Moderate

$$-$$$ **Coconut Tree II**, ☎ 445-4088 www.westbaycoconuttree.com. Only a few steps from the crystal blue waters of West Bay, Coconut Tree offers a variety of vacation rentals right on the beach, which include cabins, luxury suites and a three-bedroom home. The cabins are comfortable and charming, with finished wood walls, white tile floors and sliding glass doors leading to a small decks with a magnificent

ocean vistas. The Rock House, a unique three-story edifice with an exterior circular stairwell, is reminiscent of medieval times. The Rock House luxury suite, which comes with a full kitchen, is perfect for honeymooners. There is a high ceiling and huge pane glass windows set in wood walls, with a round wooden bed positioned in front of a gigantic wall mirror. Covered decks located along the beach are a great place to watch the sunset, enjoy a meal, or just hang out and have a place to leave your stuff while you enjoy the sea.

$$-$$$ **Hotel Caribbean Dream**, ☎ 972-8552, fax 445-1394, www.roatanet.com/caribbean, hotelcaribbeandream@roatanet.com. Eight units, each with a private entrance, accommodate from two to four persons (queen and single and/or bunk beds) and include private bath, hot water, ceiling fans, and a/c. Some rooms also have a private deck and full kitchenette. This small hotel is about 150 yards from the sandy beach. Activities include horseback riding, scuba diving, deep-sea fishing, sea kayaking, and island tours.

$$$ **Cabaña Roatana**, West Bay, ☎ 984-6134, in the US 512-853-9133, www.cabanaroatana.com, info@cabanaroatana.com. All rooms have an ocean view with spacious comfortable decks and seating, and are only a few steps from the beach. They feature queen beds, private bath, a/c, TV/VCR, ceiling fans, and a fully furnished kitchenette with microwave, small refrigerator, chilled water dispenser, and coffeemaker. Full breakfast and housecleaning are included in rates. Lunch, laundry services, and airport transfers are also available. Smoking is only allowed on porches.

$$-$$$$ **Foster's West Bay**, toll-free ☎ 971-223-2058, in the US ☎ 877-245-5907, www.fostersroatan.com, reservations@fostersroatan.com. Foster's West Bay offers accommodations ranging from beachfront rooms and single cabañas to two- and three-bedroom units with full kitchens. Accommodations include a/c, fans, private with hot water, balcony, and daily house cleaning. All the rooms and cabañas are on the beachfront and have ocean views. Several palapa-thatched decks looking over the water are a great place to hang out for the day, enjoy a cool drink, or watch the sunset. There's even a tree house cabaña (no a/c) built high in the branches of a mango tree. Amenities include restaurant, bar/lounge, happy

hour, laundry service, Internet access, and the Octopus Dive School, which offers all PADI courses from Open Water to Divemaster.

$$ **West Bay Lodge Bed & Breakfast**, West Bay, ☎ 991-0694, www.westbaylodge.com, info@westbaylodge.com. Sparkling clean private cabins with queen size beds, and large bathrooms with hot water, CD player, and a wide selection of movies to view in your cabin. The cabins have both ceiling and wall fans, but a/c is not available. Dive packages, including PADI course available with nearby dive shop.

● Rentals

Roatán Heavenly, in the US ☎ 415-381-4229, www.heavenly-roatan.com, goldieniner@yahoo.com. This spacious two-bedroom Roatán vacation rental home sleeps from six to eight people. All rooms have vaulted ceilings, ceiling fans, living room with two sofa beds, furnished front porch with ocean view. Two full baths with hot water, luxury linens, TV, DVD, CD player, full kitchen with microwave and bottled water, hammock, charcoal grill for BBQ, beach towels and lounge chairs. Rates vary from $800 to $1,000 a week depending on season.

$$$-$$$$$ **West Bay Village**, West Bay. ☎ 403-8022, www.westbayvillage.com, www.lascupulas.com, lascupulas@globalnet.hn, lascupulas@hondusoft.com. A private compound of beach villas situated on the beautiful West Bay Beach. Each vacation rental and beach villa has its own charm and is different from the others. Set in a tropical garden, you can swim, snorkel, and dive right off the shore of the West Bay Village beach. Minimum stay is one week at Christmas and Easter, three nights at any other time. Periods longer than one month are negotiable.

Options include:

St. Mac's Villa on the water's edge. The villa has an apartment that sleeps six; a beachfront studio that sleeps four; and a beach apartment that is for two guests. The **apartments** offer three bedrooms with private decks, 2½ bathrooms, full kitchen, living and dining rooms and optional TV, VCR, CD player, cable TV, safe and a/c. The **studio** provides king size bed, full bath, fans, full kitchenette, spacious living room and

dining area. Optional TV, VCR, CD player, cable TV, and safe. The **beach apartment** has one bedroom with twin beds, living and dining area, full kitchen and bath and fans. Optional a/c, cable TV, and safe. Twice a week housecleaning service included in rates; applicable taxes are not.

Mary's Place. A pretty house with furnishings that present a charming tropical ambience. It sleeps up to four adults and two children. The **master suite** has a private bath with tub. The patio doors from the master bedroom lead to a private and spacious veranda. The second bedroom also has a private bath. Open dining-kitchen area and a comfortable sofa bed in the living room. The kitchen is fully equipped and there are ceiling fans in every room. Cable TV with English, Spanish, and Italian channels, and weekly housecleaning service included in rates; applicable taxes are not.

Barefoot Dream. Luxury accommodations offered in an upper level residence and a lower level beach residence. The **upper level** sleeps up to six persons and includes master suite with king bed, second bedroom with two twins or one king bed and two large bathrooms. Spacious and bright living/dining/kitchen area, French doors open to large outdoor deck, sofa bed in living room, full kitchen, a/c, cable TV, ceiling fans throughout, and safe. The **lower level** also sleeps six people and offers a master suite with queen size bed, private bath, and a/c. The second bedroom has a double bed, private bath and a/c. Living/dining area and well-equipped kitchen. Amenities include ceiling fans throughout, safe, cable TV, CD player, radio, VCR, and movies.

Monkey LaLa. This residence also offers upper and lower units. The **upper unit** has one queen bedroom and one twin bedroom. Full open kitchen, spacious living and dining areas, TV/VCR and CD player, large bathrooms, ceiling fans in all rooms, covered deck and safe. The **beach level studio** offers a queen bed, private bath, kitchenette with gas stove, a/c and ceiling fans, safe and covered patio. Cable TV is also available.

Where to Eat

$$$ **Bite on the Beach**, ☎ 445-1332, overlooks the ocean and is a great place to watch spectacular sunsets over West Bay. The restaurant is on a large deck and offers fine dining with a full bar and an

extensive menu of steaks, burgers and their seafood specialties, which include lobster, shrimp, conch, crab and fish platters. Open from Thursday to Saturday noon to 8 pm. Closed during September.

$-$$ **Neptune's**, at Foster's West Bay, offers a varied and full menu for breakfast, lunch and dinner, specializing in fresh seafood entrées. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner until 10 pm.

$$-$$$ **Mayan Princess Beach Bar & Grill** offers a tasty selection of fine seafood and island fare from their beachfront palapa. A full menu with breakfast, lunch, dinner, salads, appetizers, and beverages, including exotic cocktails, makes this restaurant a good choice for your West Bay day of fun in the sun!

$$$ **Las Rocas Restaurant**, which is on the ocean's edge and run by Italian Chef Piero, offers Caribbean food with an Italian twist. Delicious seafood entrées include lobster in mustard sauce, shrimp in pesto, grouper in white wine and seafood pizza. Also offers nightly specials such as the "Caribbean Butterflies" platter with butterfly shrimp, lobster, and calimari served in a spicy curry-like sauce over pasta. Enjoy a great exotic cocktail such as a Monkey Lala, Piña Colada, or Daiquiri as you relax and watch the sunset. Two-for-one happy hour from 3 to 5 pm.

$$-$$$ **Cabaña Roatana Beachside Snack Shop**, ☎ 984-6134, is open for breakfast and lunch and offers such fare as breakfast tacos, hamburgers, bagel sandwiches and a variety of local dishes, as well as a complete selection of snack foods, soft drinks, and Honduran beer.

$$$ **Paradise Beach Villas Bar and Restaurant** in West Bay offers a varied menu and daily specials for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The Mojitos Beach Bar is conveniently on the beach for easy access to cold drinks.

Sandy Bay

Sandy Bay is a small beach community between Coxen Hole and West End with several attractions. Visit the Marine Science Museum, and the Carambola Botanical Gardens, or take a swim with dolphins at Anthony's Key Resort. To get there take the north shore road to West End from Coxen Hole.

Where to Stay

● All-Inclusive

Anthony's Key Resort, Sandy Bay, ☎ 445-3003, 445-1103, www.anthonyskey.com, akr@anthonyskey.com, in the US ☎ 954-929-0090 or toll free in the US 800-227-3483. This is a full-service dive resort, which has long been a favorite of divers in the know. The resort also offers an excellent snorkeling program and a range of other activities. Accommodations consist of charming wooden bungalows, which are either on the hotel's private key or on the hill about 80 steps from the dockside. Standard cabins have wooden louvered windows without a/c. Superior cabins are weather-sealed with glass windows that open and a/c. All cabins include private bath, hot water and come with one bunk bed and a double bed, two double beds or one king size bed. Check out the great package rates on the website. Depending on the season, rates range from $100 to $200 per person a day plus goodies. Other services and activities: horseback riding and hiking, kayaking, canoeing, restaurant, café, bar, gift and snack shop, and Internet access.

Bay Islands Beach Resort, Sandy Bay, ☎ 445-1425, toll-free in the US 1-800-4-ROATAN, www.bibr.com, bibrusa@aol.com. This 44-acre resort offers scuba diving, snorkeling, fishing, kayaking, and land packages. Family and children's programs are available year-round. There are handicap facilities and a Beach Bar & Grill. Accommodations are in the Main House, two garden villas, the Water's Edge Lodge, and the Beach House. Most include porches with hammocks and ocean view and all have a/c, louvered or sliding windows, ceiling fans, private baths with hot water. The BIBR dive center is a large octagonal building divided into two sections. One side serves as the dive shop while the other provides showers and storage areas for guests. BIBR's dive masters are locals who grew up diving Roatán. They are fully certified and further trained by the Handicapped Scuba Association. Property includes 450 feet of natural sandy beach, secondary rainforest, scenic overlooks, historic village, natural aquarium, aviary, streams, and hiking trails. Rates are about $100 or a little more per person depending on the season for a dive package.

● Expensive

$$$$ **Baan Suerte Cottages**, Sandy Bay. ☎ 445-1486, 991-6155, www.roatanbaansuerte.com. Stunningly landscaped to provide a lush oasis away from the crowds, Baan Suerte's two-acre property is a perfect hideaway for both families and honeymooners. Opened in 2003, it offers private and secure deluxe accommodations set amidst the natural beauty of a private beach. There are two fully appointed cottages from bath to kitchen. While the Paraíso Cottage celebrates Caribbean beach life, the Shangri-La Cottage brings a glimpse of Asia to the Caribbean. Both have kitchen, air-conditioning, ceiling fans, king-size bed (twin beds available upon request), Internet, and private porch. Baan Suerte provides a complimentary welcome basket and offers a continental breakfast of local specialties as well as world-renowned Honduran coffee. You can also request your cabin be stocked with cooking-for-yourself basics. Prepared meals are also available with previous notice. Baan Suerte is one of the few resorts on Roatán to have a private swimming pool and Jacuzzi. The spa offers body, scalp, and facial treatments as well as a massage. Ask about the "Escape to Paradise" packages. The cottages are a short walk from the Dolphin Center and the Marine Museum and 10 minutes from West End by taxi.

● Moderate

$$$ **Jungle Reef Villas**, Sandy Bay, ☎ 445-1392, www.junglereef.com, junglereef@hondusoft.com, is a complex of five new villas set on three acres above Anthony's Key Resort. Each villa includes three bedrooms with a/c, ceiling fans, two bathrooms with hot water, equipped kitchen and living room. They can accommodate up to six persons. Additional services include housecleaning services, laundry services, babysitting, cable TV, and Internet access.

● Rentals

$$ **Judy's Fantasea**, ☎ 959-4926, in the US ☎ 225-291-7518, www.roatanet.com/judys, judyRoatan@cs.com. Judy's Fantasea is a beachside home that consists of a six-sided house adjacent to a café. The house sleeps eight with three double bedrooms and one twin-bunk bedroom; there are two

full baths with hot water. Ceiling fans are throughout the house for additional ventilation. The café seats eight people at tables and eight at the bar with cable TV. Full louvered windows provide ample ventilation and exquisite views, including the island sunset. Meals may be purchased at Judy's Fantasea Cafe upon request or the kitchen can be rented for a small fee. Rooms rent for $30 per night, $200 per week, or $600 per month. The house rents for $700 per week and $2,100 per month. Judy's is about a mile from the Marine Museum.

$$ **Tropicana Beach Club Hotel** lies halfway between Coxen Hole and West End, ☎ 445-1603, www.tropicanabc.com, and is nestled on two acres of verdant tropical gardens, close enough to nearby towns to visit, but still secluded. These charming studio suites are tastefully decorated with local art and enormous windows offer beautiful ocean views. All accommodations have a private entrance, private bath, hot water, a/c, cable TV, microwave, toaster, and coffee maker. While some rooms are in the main building, other accommodations are garden cottages, which provide extra privacy. Some accommodations include a full kitchen. Amenities include an oversized balcony that offers guests spectacular sea and beach views and a place for visiting, dining, games, and reading. The fresh water swimming pool, fishpond, and gardens provide places to relax and enjoy friendly Western Caribbean breezes. All guests have use of the main balcony, BBQ grill, water trampolines and volleyball. A private dock is a great place to snorkel around or to sit and watch the sunset. Rates include welcome beverages, first morning cook-it-yourself breakfast, airport transfers, and flight confirmation. The resort also provides dormitory-style accommodation for large groups and/or extra beds. Long-term rentals are also available during low season based on availability. Also provided are snorkel equipment rental, fishing, and island tours upon request.

Seadancer Villas, Sandy Bay, ☎ 948-7709, www.roatanseadancer.com, sharoncards@aol.com. A collection of seven individual homes set right on the beach available for short- and long-term rentals. Furnished accommodations consist of two-bedroom, two-bathroom villas with living/dining and

fully equipped kitchen, and a full complement of sheets, towels, etc. The fantastic reef lies just offshore and all the cottages overlook the crystal-clear waters of the Caribbean Sea. Each villa has a large deck and hammocks to enjoy the view. There is a 350-foot dock with sundeck, which is just a short five-minute swim to the reef. Barbecues and beach furniture can be found on the secluded, white sand beach that stretches for almost a mile. Several wind surfboards, kayaks, and 14-foot catamarans are also available. Rates vary from $500 per week in the low season to $900 per week during the high season.

$$-$$$ **Beachfront Sundancer Vacation Rentals**, Sandy Bay, www.sundancerroatan.com, sundancer@globalnet.hn. Well-maintained cabañas offer an inexpensive beach location for your Roatán vacation. Cabañas have decks, two bedrooms, a shower, and/or bath with open living and fully equipped kitchen areas. Some cabañas include a loft area for extra sleeping space or for storage. Cabañas comfortably accommodate up to six people, and a baby crib is available on request. There is a swimming pool and a private dock with thatched roof, as well as sun deck. There are steps at the end of the dock for easy access to the water. From the dock the reef, which is part of the Roatán Marine Sanctuary, is just a short swim away and perfect for snorkeling and diving. A deep channel in the reef near the property offers boat access to deeper waters for fishing and diving charters. On-site management services offered through the office include telephone, Internet, bottled drinking water (first bottle free), book exchange, diving, fishing, and tour information. Cabaña rates depend on season: from $500 to $1,000 per week; $100 to $200 per night with a three-night minimum stay. Long-term lease discounts are available. Airport transfers, laundry and housecleaning are included.

$ **Captain Ron's Hideaway**, Sandy Bay Beach, www.captainronshideaway.net, is situated on Roatán's northwest shore in a secluded and quiet area that is only a few minutes drive east to Coxen Hole for shopping or west for enjoying the nightlife in West End Village. There is a one-bedroom apartment that comfortably sleeps two, with a/c and double doors opening on to the ocean, private bath, hot water. There

is also a two-bedroom apartment for up to four people with double doors opening on to the ocean, private bath, hot water. The apartments share a furnished beach patio for visiting, eating or just hanging out. The beach cabaña for two people is set a little farther back than the apartments and offers a little more privacy and has a large covered deck with beach and ocean views. Rates are weekly. Airport transfers, cable TV/DVD and movies, full kitchens, ceiling fans, bottled water, long dock with over-the-water covered gazebo and welcome drink. Beach location with public transportation available a short walk away on the main road.

Where to Eat

$$-$$$ **Rick's American Café & Sports Bar** in Sandy Bay offers US-style meals including giant burgers, USDA steaks and baby back ribs, delicious seafood platters and a full bar with ocean views. This popular restaurant is set on the hillside up from the parking lot. A steep set of 65 stairs lead you to the restaurant with an ample deck, which provides a spectacular ocean view as well as starry night dining. Food service is available from 5 to 9:30 pm. The bar stays open until 11:30 pm or later with happy hour from 5 to 6 pm. Satellite sports channels.

$$ **Blue Parrot** in Sandy Bay is on the highway just east of Lawson's Rock at Sundancer. Specialties include grilled shrimp, lobster, chicken, and steaks accompanied with fresh salads and ice-cold beer. This restaurant offers a full bar, indoor/outdoor seating and is open Monday to Saturday from noon to 9 pm.

$$ **Dolphin Café** is in Anthony's Key Resort in front of the Roatán Museum and offers sandwiches, burgers, ice cream, and refreshments. Open from Thursday to Tuesday. You can watch the dolphin shows from here.

Flowers Bay

Flowers Bay is a small community on the southwestern shore of the island between Coxen Hole and West End known as the iron shore due to its lava rock shoreline. To get there take the unpaved, south-shore road to West End from Coxen Hole.

Where to Stay

$$ **The Blue House**, Flowers Bay. In the US ☎ 904-223-1826, roatanbluehouse@aol.com, is a dramatic ocean-front retreat with breaking waves and spectacular views. Two bedrooms, 2½ baths, full kitchen, dining area and living room with futon – sleeps six. Two queen beds, one sofa bed, with air conditioners and ceiling fans in both bedrooms, as well as full private bathrooms, two alarm clock radios, fourth-floor lookout, second-story deck, walkway to the ocean and steps down into the ocean. There is beautiful scuba diving and snorkeling in the front yard. Also has a CD player, TV, DVD player, books, games, binoculars, full kitchen, microwave/convection oven, range with oven, refrigerator, blender, toaster, coffee maker, extensive cooking utensils, basic bar accompaniments, linens provided, washing machine, gas grill (barbecue). Pets not allowed and no smoking. Housekeeper and family lives on premises and will provide cooking and laundry services for a moderate fee. Rates $600 per week up to four people.

Coxen Hole

Coxen Hole provides little in the way of diversion and is not a very inviting place in general. Most travelers only visit to go shopping or go to the bank.

Where to Stay

$-$$ **Hotel Cay View**, ☎ 445-1222, 455-0269, rooms provide a double bed with private bath, hot water, a/c, ceiling fans, and cable TV. Additional services include bar and restaurant on premises.

$ **Hotel Bella Vista**, ☎ 445-1036. Accommodations include private bath, fan, and cable TV. There is also a hotel bar.

Where to Eat

$ **Bojangles Chicken** and **Pizza Inn** are next to the gas station just outside of Coxen Hole on the main island road.

$ **H.B. Warren's Supermarket** in Coxen Hole also has an attached diner with rotisserie chicken and cafeteria food.

$$ **Qué Tal Café**, Thicket Street, Coxen Hole, ☎ 445-1007, quetal@globalnet.hn, is next door to the Casi Todo Bookstore and offers gourmet coffee, cappuccino, deli sandwiches, home-baked cookies and fruit smoothies. Open Monday to Friday for breakfast and lunch from 7 am to 3 pm.

Area East of Coxen Hole

French Harbor

Heading east on the paved road out of Coxen Hole leads you past Brick Bay to French Harbor, which is the second-largest town on the Bay Islands. A huge fishing fleet docks in the port of this busy town, which is the most important port in the Bay Islands and the center of economic activity. Be sure to pay a visit to Archie's Iguana Farm while you're there.

Adventures on Water

Subway Watersports, Brick Bay, ☎ 387-0579, 386-8260, www.subwaywatersports.com, info@subwaywatersports.com. This is the first dive shop in Roatán to win the National Geographic Award and offers diving, sailing, kayaking, fishing, water skiing and snorkeling. A PADI Gold Palm Resort, Subway has all the basic PADI courses, from Discover Scuba through Dive Master. Specialty courses include Enriched Air Diver (Nitrox), Night Diver, Deep Diver, Wreck Diver, Fish Identification, and Peak Performance Buoyancy. Courses available for divers and non-divers include Emergency First Response (with training material and certification), a basic one-day training course in CPR and emergency care. There is also a PADI Project AWARE Course to familiarize divers and non-divers with the plight of worldwide aquatic ecosystems and to describe what individuals can do to help protect them. They also have Coral Reef Conservation and Beginning Fish Watching. You can try water skiing, wakeboarding, knee boarding, or a ride on an action towable for $30 per person as well. Several different daily sailing options are also available, with a minimum of four passengers, for $35 to $85 per person.

Subway provides reef fishing on the south side of Roatán for one hour ($50), half-day ($180), or a full day ($290). Deep sea fishing several miles offshore in the open sea and over sea

mounts for marlin and other big game fish is also available for a half-day ($300) or a full day ($500). Prices are for the boat with up to four passengers and include guide, gear, soft drinks, beer, and lunch on a full-day trip.

Adventures on Land

Iguana Farm, French Key. Sherman Arch began the Iguana Farm almost 20 years ago to provide iguanas with a safe haven. Although he doesn't actually breed the iguanas, he does provide nesting grounds and recover the hatchlings to protect them from predators. They are later released when they are large enough to fend for themselves. These days, nearly 3,000 iguanas are in residence on the farm. The best time to see the iguanas is during feeding time in the early afternoon. Admission is $5 per person for adults and children.

Where to Stay

All-Inclusive

Brick Bay Resort, ☎ 387-0579, 386-8260, is an all-inclusive resort where Subway Watersports is located (info@subwaywatersports.com). It has 30 rooms with private baths, hot water and optional a/c. The high, ventilated ceilings keep the rooms cool even if you don't use the fan or the a/c. Most rooms have a balcony overlooking the marina. The restaurant at the hotel offers buffet-style island cuisine. Dive package specials run about $75 a day per person and include three dives a day and accommodations.

CoCo View Resort is just east of French Harbor, ☎ 455-5011, toll-free in the US 1-800-510-8164, www.cocoviewresort.com, ccv@roatan.com. This has what some consider the best dive deal in the Caribbean. A superb location on the water's edge and an extremely organized resort provide truly unlimited diving. Several spectacular dive sites including the *Prince Albert* wreck, are reachable from the shore. There are 25 spacious, comfortable rooms with ceiling fans and a/c. Four bungalows (two kings, two doubles), which are only available for weekly rentals, are over-water octagon duplexes with mini-refrigerators and French doors opening to private porches with hammocks. A

HOTEL PRICE CHART Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.	
	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	US$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

seven-day dive package includes: welcome cocktail, airport transfers, three full meals daily, one barbecue and one picnic on a private cay (weather permitting), night diving, two boat dive trips daily including one tank at selected site and optional drop-off wall dive (up to four boat tanks daily); tanks, belts, and weights; free use of ocean kayaks and non-motorized beach equipment; hot tub; exercise equipment as well as ample opportunities for sightseeing, picnicking, and day or night time excursions. Optional diving, Internet access, spa service, tours, day-trips, and handicap accessibility with prior notice is available. Non-diver packages offer the same (without the diving). Children 10 years and older are welcome. Rates vary from about US$125 to $150 based on double occupancy.

$$$-$$$$ **Fantasy Island Resort**, French Harbor, ☎ 455-7499, www.fantasyislandresort.com, amalia@bonnebeach.com. This is on a private, 21-acre island near French Harbor. 107 rooms with a/c, carpeting ceiling fan, satellite TV, telephone, refrigerator, sitting area and balcony with ocean view. All baths have tub and shower. Amenities include indoor/outdoor lounges, two tennis courts, basketball court, swimming pool, two bars with live entertainment and a well-stocked boutique. The hotel has two restaurants offering international and island cuisine. Bed & Breakfast, Meal Plan, and Dive Fantasy package rates available.

$$$ **Roatán Dive & Yacht Club**, French Harbor, ☎ 455-5233, www.roatanyachtclub.com, info@roatan-yachtclub.com. Near the entrance to French Harbor and just 15 minutes from the airport, the Roatán Dive & Yacht Club is on five acres of tropical gardens. Facilities include marina, hotel, restaurant, a full-service PADI dive center, a water sports center, swimming pool and bar with ocean view. There are both standard and deluxe rooms, as well as an executive suite. Some rooms have terraces and all are equipped with

cable TV, radio, ceiling fans, a/c, hair dryer, private bath, and hot water. Laundry services and Internet access are also available. Hotel restaurant opens from 7 am to 9:30 pm, and offers breakfast, lunch and dinner specials, as well as an international menu that includes fresh seafood and pizza. The bar/lounge has a daily happy hour. The Club's Wellness Center gives facials, body treatments, and massages. Dive center has dive courses, fun dives, fishing, and boat trips. Spa, dive, and all-inclusive packages offered.

$$$-$$$$ **Palmetto Bay Plantation**, North Shore near Craw Fish Rock Village, four miles from French Harbor, ☎ 991-0811, www.palmettobayplantation.com, rentalinfo@palmettobayplantation.com. This is a spectacular eco-sensitive resort on a secluded north shore bay. Forty of the resort's 109 acres remain in their natural state and have boardwalks and hiking trails that allow you to meander through lush gardens and bird sanctuaries. You can also walk along the gorgeous white sand beach for miles in either direction from the resort and not encounter another hotel or resort. The rental home designs incorporate tropical island simplicity with comfortable luxury. Every home has a great room with living/dining areas and a fully equipped kitchen. Louvered, hardwood doors in the great room and bedrooms can be rolled back to reveal tropical vistas of palm trees, exotic flowers, and sea views. No matter which home you are in, a short walk through lush tropical gardens will lead you to the beach, swimming pool, or seaside restaurant "Mama Adriana." Italian chef Adriana heads the kitchen, offering a variety of well-prepared international, Italian, and island-style platters. Laundry, airport transfer, bar/lounge, daily house cleaning, fans, balcony/terrace, diving equipment rental, babysitting, and complimentary kayaks. Subway is the Water Sports Center for Palmetto Bay Resort and offers diving, snorkeling, fishing, sailing, water skiing, and kayaking.

Moderate

$$$ **Casa Romeo's**, French Harbor, ☎ 455-5518, www.casaromeos.com, casaromeo@globalnet.hn. A quaint Caribbean-style hotel in the heart of French Harbor, overlooking the port area. Deluxe accommodations include a/c, cable TV, and telephone, high-speed Internet, private bath,

hot water and shower/tub. As the hotel does not have a private beach, there is a boat available for guests, which is well equipped for scuba diving and local exploration of the Island. There's also a van for Island tours and picnics. The hotel restaurant has an international menu that includes steaks, seafood, and a variety of pasta and other Italian platters. Full-service bar. Ask about special rates that include breakfast, dinner, and car rental.

$$ **Buccaneer Hotel**, ☎ 455-5032, overlooks the water and has 19 double rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, cable TV, telephone and safe in room. There is a restaurant, bar, pool and a large wooden deck overlooking the water.

Budget

$ **Harbor View**, ☎ 445-5390, is a small hotel with eight rooms offering private bath with hot water, a/c, fan, cable TV and a view of the harbor.

Rentals

$$-$$$ **Barefoot Cay** is between Brick Bay and French Harbor, www.barefootcay.com, info@barefootcay.com, ☎ 455-6235, 967-3642, from the US 1-866-246-3706, 1-305-433-2913. This is a privately owned four-acre island on the south shore, just off the main road of Roatán and separated from the island by a 100-foot-wide canal. This is a good rental option for a secluded vacation close to town. Moreover, riding back and forth on boats is always fun. The cay is safely behind the reef, which allows small boats access to French Harbor even on a blustery day. The reef and the Mary's Place dive site are within swimming distance from the secluded 500-foot-long sandy beach. Accommodations include two guest bungalows, each with a spacious bedroom, bath, kitchen and covered deck overlooking the ocean. Each bungalow has ceiling fans, a/c, a 24-inch TV-DVD-VCR, cable TV, and high-speed satellite Internet. Pillow-top Heavenly Beds can be configured as king-size or two extra long twins. Rollaway beds are available for extra guests. The fully equipped kitchen includes an eating bar and purified drinking water from the tap. Other amenities are custom prepared meals, barbecue, ice machine, laundry service, swimming dock with thatched roof palapa at the end; swimming pool; snorkel equipment, and small

watercraft such as new Cobra kayaks, an authentic Indian dugout canoe, and a glass bottom rowboat. The 14-foot skiffs that transport passengers between the shore and the cay are also available for touring. Pick-up arrangements by a dive shop for diving excursions offered. See Barefoot Cay Marina, page 171.

Where to Eat

$$$$ **Gio's Restaurant**, ☎ 455-5214, in French Harbor, offers fine dining and is best known for its King Crab platter. An international menu includes pastas, steaks, and seafood entrées accompanied by grilled vegetables and fresh salads. Full bar service, wine, coffee, and desserts. Open Monday to Saturday from 10 am to 2 pm and 5-10 pm.

$$-$$$ **Roatán Dive & Yacht Club**, ☎ 455-5233, offers pizza, steak and chicken entrées as well as some very good sandwiches.

$$-$$$ **Romeo's Restaurant**, ☎ 455-5518, provides excellent service and food including USDA Choice steaks, home-made pasta, imported cheeses, freshly grown herbs, and a full bar with fine imported wines. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

$ **Rotisserie Chicken** is just east of the Texaco gas station in French Harbor and a favorite local spot for a quick meal. This eatery offers portions (quarter, half or a whole) of chicken accompanied by salad and a soft drink; or try a yummy chicken, beans and rice platter.

$ **Shantel's**, in the red building just before the canal bridge, offers good food such as made-to-order tacos, island-style platters, and ice-cold sodas.

DINING PRICE CHART

Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.

$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

Area East of French Harbor

The paved road east of French Harbor climbs the ridge separating the south and north shores for some spectacular views of both sides of the island.

$$$ **The View Restaurant** is east of French Harbor on the main road just before the Parrot Tree turn-off. A large deck overlooks Milton Bight and the north shore and is worth the visit just for the view. This is an excellent restaurant with an ample menu including steaks, seafood, soups, and even roasted duck! Full bar service includes exotic cocktails. Highly recommended.

First Bight

A small ocean inlet on the south shore just five miles east of French Harbor and about 15 minutes from the airport.

Where to Stay

$$-$$$ **Coral Beach Inn**, First Bight, South Shore near CoCo View Resort, ☎ 991-3263, www.members.aol.com/cbeachinn/home.htm, cbeachinn@aol.com. This is on a secluded, powdery white sand beach that ends right on the reef. Accommodations vary from standard rooms and apartments to cabins/villas with kitchenettes. All include private bath, hot water, and cable TV. There is a Jacuzzi, laundry Internet/telephone/fax, airport transfer, safety box and Jeep rental. They offer diving, fishing, snorkeling, kayaking, hiking, horseback riding, and water tours. Hotel restaurant and full-service bar provide free room service. Meal packages are also available.

$$ **Lizard's Thicket**, First Bight, ☎ 979-2675, in the US 484-241-4143, lucyjoyce1@yahoo.com, www.roatanet.com/lizard. Three fully furnished rental apartments on the point of the bay overlooking the inlet and the ocean. One large apartment includes two bedrooms, a fully equipped kitchen, and large living room with cable TV/VCR. Two studio apartments offer private bath kitchenette and cable TV/VCR. Grounds also boast a 15 x 30-foot pool and a Jacuzzi. Private covered dock for ocean swimming and fishing. All utilities are included, sheets and towels are washed once a week, and a small gym is available for guest use. Personal laundry and

use of Jacuzzi are at an extra charge to cover the cost of electricity. For the large apartment, rates are $60 a night, $350 a week or $750 a month. For studio apartments, rates are $35 a night, $175 a week or $400 a month. No pets allowed and non-smokers preferred.

Second Bight

The road continues toward Second Bight where the **Parrot Tree Plantation**, www.parrot-tree.net, is located – a luxury residential/condo/tourist/marina development. Parrot Tree offers five rental homes, which are luxurious, expensive and somewhat isolated.

$$$$ **Santé Wellness Center Bed & Breakfast**, Parrot Tree Plantation, Second Bight, ☎ 991-0470, in the US 1-510-315-1238, www.santewellnesscenter.com, sante@globalnet.hn. This is at Marina Point, and is the island's ultimate getaway, with no road access, no noise, no neighbors, and no crowds. On a tranquil spit of land facing out to sea, among palm and mango trees, select from an array of relaxing spa services, therapeutic massage, European facials, herbal body wraps, and more. Snorkel on the brilliant reef just yards from the spa's private beach. The charming and intimate guest room comes with a mini-bar, a/c, private bath, and outdoor splash pool. Rates include airport transfer, a/c, welcome cocktails, and snacks, continental breakfast, kayaking, and boat snorkeling with gear provided. Meal plans, spa and dive packages also available.

onesville

Farther along on the road to Oak Ridge is the turn-off to Jonesville, a typical fishing village on the south shore dotted with homes on stilts and boats in the water. Just follow the road into town until you reach the dock.

Adventure on the Water

You can arrange a **tour of the mangrove canal** by calling Art, ☎ 455-2158, the day before to arrange for a dory tour ($20 to $25). The canal was originally dug to allow small vessels passage between the harbors and bays in the Jonesville-Oak Ridge-Calabash Bight area without venturing into the open sea beyond the reef.

Where to Eat

$$ **Hole-in-the-Wall Bar and Restaurant** is a funky "over the water" establishment and one of the best values found on Roatán. Only accessible by sea, the restaurant is on a wooden dock beneath a verdant cliff. Fishnets hang on the walls and a scarlet macaw swings from the eves or rides on the bartender's shoulder. You'll feel right at home as you sip a cold beer while you enjoy the ocean view and the unique atmosphere. Sunday and Wednesday from 1 to 3 pm the restaurant offers all-you-can-eat surf n' turf (lobster and steak) barbecue accompanied by vegetables, potatoes and a salad, and topped off with a homemade dessert for just $10 per person. A must do. To get there take the boat from the Jonesville dock. The restaurant has a dory traveling back and forth between 12 and 2 pm. If you don't see that happening and there isn't any transportation available at the dock; just ask someone from one of the nearby houses to radio the restaurant and they will send a dory to come get you.

$$ **Art's Place** is a small, family-run eatery on the waterfront in Jonesville, which offers breakfast plus a selection of beef, chicken, and seafood platters. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

East End of Roatán

Oak Ridge

Oak Ridge is about nine miles from French Harbor on the southern shore. This charming fishing port is often referred to as the "Venice of the Caribbean" because most of the homes are over the water, and everyone uses small boats and water taxis to get around.

Adventures on Water

Take a tour through the mangrove canal, going diving, or fishing with one of the nearby resorts, or take a boat tour of the area. **B.J.'s Backyard Restaurant** is a good place to arrange boat tours around Barbareta and the Pigeon Cays, with spectacular snorkeling for $50.

Where to Stay

● Budget

$ **Hotel San José**, ☎ 435-2328, is on a small cay across the water from the dock.

● All-Inclusive Dive Resorts

$$-$$$ **Oak Bay Resort**, Oak Ridge, ☎ 435-2337, www.roatandiving.com, ah6pn@arrl.net. This small all-inclusive scuba diving resort boasts the "lowest priced dive packages on Roatán!" Courses offered include Open Water Diver, Specialty Courses, Rescue Diver, Advanced Open Water Diver, Dive Master, and Assistant Instructor. The Experienced Diver packages ranges from $460 in a six-person group to $585 for one person and includes seven nights of accommodations, all meals, 12 boat dives, unlimited shore dives and airport transfers for two or more people. The Learn Scuba Dive Program ranges from $475 in a six-person group to $585 for one person and includes six nights of accommodations, all meals, Open Water Scuba Diver Certification Course, six training dives, use of books and dive equipment and airport transfers for two or more people. The Backpackers Special Open Water Certification course ranges from $295 for two to three people to $350 for four or more and includes Open Water Scuba Diver Certification Course, use of dive equipment, required Scuba dives, up to five nights accommodation (shared), shared bathroom and all meals (beer, wine, and sodas are extra). Rates do not include daily housecleaning and transportation to or from resort. All persons completing open water are required to pay a $25 certification card fee. Accommodations include complimentary computer use to check your e-mail. Prices are set so the more people in your group the lower the price. Non-diver rates also available. No children and no walk-ins are allowed.

$$$$ **Reef House Resort**, Oak Ridge, ☎ 435-2297, in the US 1-800-328-8897, www.reefhouseresort.com, reefdiving@aol.com. A dedicated dive resort on a cay off the southeast shore of the Island, a reef flat at the edge of the sea, which allows you to step off the stone pier to snorkel or dive a beautiful coral wall. The plantation-style buildings include 12 dou-

ble rooms, all opening onto a shaded veranda, and two separate rooms built up high for an unobstructed view of the ocean. All the rooms have queen-sized beds, ceiling fans and movable fans, private bath, hot water. There are triple-occupancy rooms and rates for children. Some rooms have a/c and cable TV. The dive shop is well equipped and offers PADI and SSI dive courses. Divers are supplied with weights, weight belts, tanks, and unlimited air. Rental equipment is available and there are three boat dives per day, one night-dive from the boat during the week, and unlimited shore diving. Non-divers have the use of the snorkeling equipment and are welcome to use the kayaks and windsurfers, or to accompany the dive boat trips. Salt-water flat fishing for bonefish, permit, tarpon, and wahoo is available with an experienced guide. The full day's excursion provides anglers with a small craft, and a picnic lunch.

$$-$$$ **Tropical Beach Resort**, Calabash Bight, on the south shore between Oak Ridge and Port Royal, ☎ 435-2725, www.bayislandtropicalbeachresort.com, rodjean123@yahoo.com. This small oceanfront resort offers complete solitude and comfort surrounded by unparalleled beauty. Just a few steps from the beach, five private cabañas with spacious decks facing the ocean sit amidst coconut palms, hibiscus, and guava trees. Rooms are equipped with private bath, hot water, fan, and cable TV. Some rooms have a/c. Specializing in small groups and personalized attention, this resort offers a wide variety of dive courses, fun dives, as well as boat rentals, fishing charters and sightseeing eco-tours. They also have fishing and diving packages with reduced lodging rates. The **Hummingbird Restaurant & Bar** has an international menu with fresh seafood specials. Children 12 years old and younger are free.

Where to Eat

$ **B.J.'s Backyard** is in a rustic, shaded deck at the water's edge in front of Bodden's Supermarket. This is a good place to have a cold beer or soda and arrange a boat tour of the mangrove tunnels.

Northeastern Shore

About three miles from Oak Ridge on the northern coast is **Punta Gorda**. Punta Gorda is the oldest Garífuna community in Honduras. Farther east along the north shore is **Paya Bay**.

Cultural Adventure

YÜBU, Politilly Bight, just before Punta Gorda's first entrance and 20 minutes east of French Harbor, www.garifuna-experience.com, ☎ 455-6713, 978-5463. Learn about the history, language, music, ancestral traditions and the spirit of the Garífuna people. The Garífuna Village is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 9 am to 3 pm with dances at 10 and 2. There is a museum, gift shop and snack bar. $5 admission fee.

On the Beach

About three miles east of Punta Gorda is the beautiful **Camp Bay**. Isolated and quiet, the bay offers a two-mile long pristine white sand beach. This is the perfect place for a secluded picnic and snorkeling in seldom seen reefs. You'll have to bring your food and drinks, as no services are offered here.

Where to Stay

● All-Inclusive

$$$ **Henry's Cove Resort**, Punta Gorda, ☎ 435-2184, www.henryscove.com, carlosgarbutt@henryscove.com, offers 14 rooms with queen-size beds, a/c, ceiling, fan, and a private bath with hot water. There are 20 bungalows with two separate rooms that include queen-size beds, sofa bed, and sitting room with a/c, ceiling fan and private bath with hot water shower. All accommodations have access to the oceanfront. There is a large pool, an air-conditioned bar with TV and a recreational area. Activities include kayaking, horseback riding, nature trails, canoeing, snorkeling or diving. Rates are around $100 a day for a seven-day vacationer, snorkel, or dive package, with three meals a day, beach picnic, kayaking, welcome cocktail,

Garífuna entertainment, and airport transfers. Dive packages include three boat dives and one night dive daily, plus weights and belts.

$$ **Ben's Restaurant and Dive Shop**, ☎ 445-1916, is on the coast of Punta Gorda. Native islander Ben offers eight simple cabins and offers various dive courses. The restaurant features Garífuna dances every Saturday night. Rates include airport transfer and a welcome drink.

$$$ **Paya Bay Resort**, Paya Bay ☎ 435-2139, in the US 1-888-662-2466, www.payabay.com, payabay@globalnet.hn. Paya Bay is a charming boutique beach and dive resort with enchanting natural beauty. Visitors can look forward to isolated beaches, and unlimited snorkeling on the secluded reef about 100 yards from the shore. The restaurant and rooms are nestled among a forest of sea palms and sea grape trees, atop one of the highest cliffs on the island. The views in all directions are spectacular. Guests have access to two pristine beaches right down the slope from their rooms. Accommodations consist of 12 rooms with private balconies and ocean views, queen-size beds, ceiling fans, private bath, hot water, some with a/c, refrigerators. Two-person packages average $100 a day for each person and include three meals a day, lodging, and activity. Boat tours, laundry service, telephone, and high-speed Internet are also available.

● Where to Eat

$$-$$$ **The Windsong Bar/Café** is in Punta Blanca one mile past Oak Ridge, dorichi@globalnet.hn. It has outdoor seating on a deck with a great view of the north shore. A full menu includes daily specials, fresh fish, burgers, and their famous fresh bread, which they bake daily. Open for dinner only from 3 to 8 pm Thursday to Monday.

$$-$$$ **Paya Bay Restaurant**, ☎ 435-2139, 435-2138, is a good place to have lunch and spend the afternoon. Follow the signs beyond Oak Ridge. The resort is perched on a cliff of massive boulders next to secluded white sand beaches. The air-conditioned restaurant provides magnificent views and a full menu features a variety of seafood (fish, shrimp, lobster,

and conch), as well as beef, pork, and poultry platters. Drinks include blended fruit juices, wine and Honduran beer. This is a good place for a romantic getaway. Don't forget your bathing suits for an after-dinner swim.

$ **Sacrifice Bar and Restaurant**, run by Mrs. Dorette Martinez, offers fresh seafood platters such as deep-fried lobster as well as Garífuna food. This is small local restaurant/hang-out with a relaxed atmosphere and reggae music in the background.

Port Royal

The road ends in Port Royal, which is on the southeast shore and is the site of the remains of the British fort. The eastern end of the island forms the **Port Royal Park and Wildlife Refuge**, which is made of mangrove swamps and is home to the yellow-nape parrot, an endangered species.

Where to Stay

$$$-$$$$ **The Lodge at Mango Creek**, Port Royal, ☎ 435-2576, www.mangocreeklodge.com, reservations@mangocreeklodge.com. This is a fly-fishing lodge. Inaccessible by land, it is a fisherman's dream for getting away from it all. Bonefish, permit, and tarpon are the most common species that expert guides will help you catch on the flats and in the reefs. Accommodations for 12 to 18 people in the main guesthouse and over-the-water cabañas connected by wooden boardwalks on stilts. All accommodations include private deck, bath, hot water, fans, and daily housecleaning. Beach and snorkeling are also available. The Lodge's restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and serves great island platters. There is unlimited snorkeling, free use of kayaks, canoes, and catamarans.

Where to Eat

The Mango Creek Lodge, ☎ 435-2576, has an over-the-water restaurant serving great Cajun-style seafood platters accompanied by fresh garden salads and followed by delicious desserts. Only open on Saturdays.

Barbaretta, St. Helene, Morat & Pigeon Cays

Just east of Roatán, these cays offer pristine coral reefs and beautiful beaches, which are perfect for a day-trip. You can arrange for a boat, diving, or snorkeling tour of the area from any of the resorts. Another option is to ask at BJ's in Oak Ridge how to arrange one. Tours out of Oak Ridge generally cost around $50.

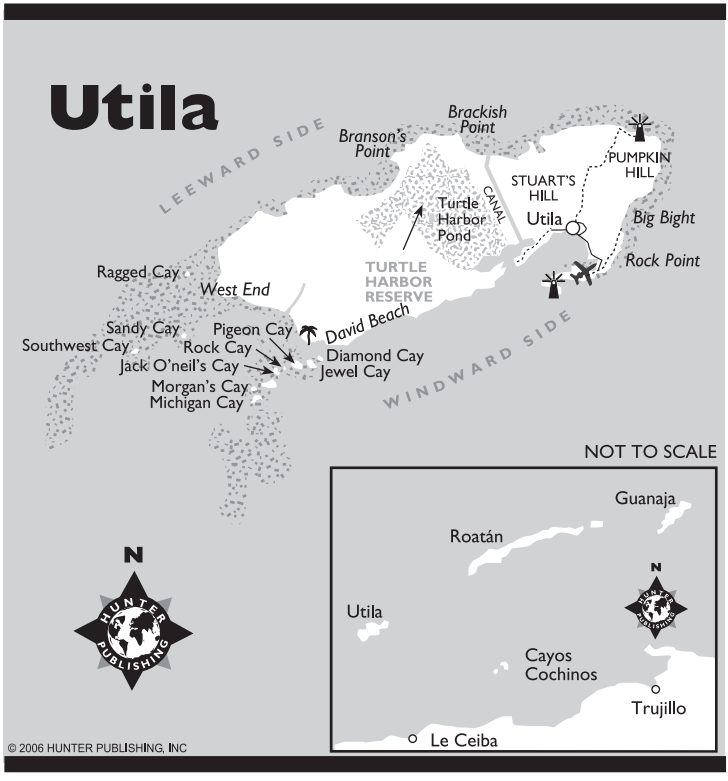
> **Tip:** For more about Roatán, visit www.roatanet.com, which provides a wide array of information on the island. If you fall in love with the island during your visit and want to stay forever, buy a vacation home, or invest in island real estate, contact **Steve Hasz** at www.roatan.net. Another real estate website is **Roatán Life**, www.roatanlife.com.

■ Utila

Utila is the smallest of three larger Bay Islands and the closest to the mainland. The island is about three miles wide and eight miles long. Only the areas along the coasts are slightly built up. The rest is mostly marshlands. There is a series of 11 cays on the southwestern tip of the island. Two are inhabited. Another, Water Cay, a beautiful expanse of white sand surrounded by shallow turquoise waters, is open to the public for leisure and camping. You won't find the abundant spectacular beaches of Roatán on Utila or as many resorts and amenities.

The reef system is extensive, however, and there are over 50 identified dive sites. Whale sharks, the largest fish in the sea, can also be found in the waters around Utila during certain times of the year, which has contributed to the island's popularity as a dive destination.

The low-budget diving has earned the island a reputation as one of the cheapest places in the world to obtain a diver's certification and the young backpacker crowd flocks here. The commercial center is known as **Utila Town**, which is basically a one-street villiage lined with oceanfront dive shops, hotels, bars, and restaurants. If you're searching for a quiet



beach vacation, you might want to consider Roatán instead. Nevertheless, the laid-back lifestyle of the locals and the young crowd of travelers make for a lively party scene that any fun-loving soul will find gratifying.

Getting There

To get to Utila take the ferry or a local flight from La Ceiba. Getting around the island is easy and it is virtually impossible to get lost. The ferry docks in the middle of town and the main street runs east-west along the shore. East leads to the airport and west to Sandy Bay, which is the only beach near town. Straight up from the pier is the **Cola de Mico (Monkey Tail) road**, which leads out of town and into the bush. If you leave Utila

Utila Town
JERICO ROAD
BAMBOO WALK
AIRPORT ROAD
ROCKY HILL
WESTERN PATH ROAD
LOZANO ROAD
Hondutel
BEACH
Ferry Dock
East Harbour
to Utila Cays
to
OLD AIRSTRIP
Upper Lagoon
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PLACES TO STAY & EAT
1. Island Café
2. Munchie's, Slumberland Villas
3. Mango Tree Espresso
4. Coco Loco
5. La Piccola
6. Tranquila Bar
7. Media Luna Restaurant
8. Utila Lodge
9. Ultralight Restaurant
10. Hotel Utila
11. Bayview Hotel
12. Backpackers Lodge
13. Driftwood Rest. & Bar
14. Seaside Inn
15. Margaritaville Beach Hotel
16. Colibrí Hill Resort
17. Annie Marelli B&B
18. Coral View Beach Resort, Slumberland Villas, Laguna Beach Resort
19. Tropical Hotel
20. Jade Seahorse, Treetanic Bar
21. Golosinas Glady's
22. Bundu Café
23. Rubi's Inn
24. Zanzibar Café
25. Cooper's Inn, Delany's Kitchen
26. Cross Creek Hotel
27. Hotel Celena
28. RJ's Barbeque Grill
29. Sharkey's Reef Hotel
30. Mango Inn, Café Mango
31. Bar in the Bush
NOT TO SCALE

on the ferry, the Municipality charges an extra Lps. 25 for use of the dock.

Most places are within walking distance from the dock, but, if you have a lot of luggage, you can catch a taxi, usually a pick-up truck. Just walk to the end of the block at the crossroads and ask anyone in a car.

For those arriving on a private vessel, anchorage is available at many of the small docks in Utila's East Harbor in front of the main town. The Port Captain's and Immigration offices are on the municipal dock and are open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm.

Getting Around

By Bicycle, Scooter & Motorcycle

Bodden Rentals, ☎ 425-3245, scooters, bicycles, ATVs and golf carts for getting around. Open 8 am to 5 pm Monday to Saturday and on Sunday 1-5 pm.

Practicalities

Banking

There are no ATM machines on Utila. Two of the banks, **BGA** and **Banco Atlántida**, offer Visa Card cash withdrawals and cash traveler's checks in US dollars. Both are open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm and on Saturday from 8:30 am to 12:30 pm.

Internet

The lowest rates are offered at the **Bay View Hotel** (west of the pier) at Lps. 3 per minute with a 15-minute minimum. **Howell Internet** (east from the pier) charges slightly more with no minimum.

Learning

The Central American Language School, ☎ 425'3788, www.ca-spanish.com, has a variety of courses at modest prices.

Shopping

Bay Island Originals has specialty Honduran goods, including coffees and cigars.

Di Gial Beauty Salon and Souvenir Shop is west of the pier in front of Henderson Supermarket, and has an array of typical island souvenirs including handmade jewelry, sarongs, bathing suits and typical Honduran wood handicrafts and hammocks. The salon offers all the usual beauty services such as bikini waxes as well as Caribbean braids and hair extensions. Open daily from 8 am to 8:30 pm.

Henderson's Supermarket is in the center of Utila, on Main Street, west of the public dock. This store has fresh fish, meat, vegetables; a deli; pharmaceuticals; beauty and household products and a large selection of dried and canned goods, as well as ice, sodas, beer and fuel. They also offer beer and fuel at their dock next to Paradise Divers. Money exchange and cash advances are provided as well.

Annual Events

Sun Jam, Water Cay, www.sunjamutila.com. The Sun Jam techno-festival is held every year during the first week of August. Music groups from around the world join 500+ partygoers on the uninhabited Water Cay for two days of festivities. To get there take the "party boat" from the main pier in Utila at 1 pm on Saturday. Services provided include a fully stocked bar and food services, space for tents and hammocks, first-aid tent, portable toilets and cloak room services. Entrance is $20. No drinks, drugs, weapons, video cameras, digital cameras, conventional cameras, or recording devices of any kind allowed.

For those not interested in attending the Sun Jam, this might not be a good time to visit Utila. Hotel rooms are scarce, prices tend to go up, and some of the dive shops close for the weekend.

Sightseeing

Island of the Three Iguanas

"Deep within the mangrove swamps lives a very special creature unique to this one location: the Utila iguana (shown at left). This is the only island in the world that supports three different species of iguanas: the Utila iguana, the black spiny-tailed iguana, and the common green iguana.

To the inhabitants of the island, the Utila iguana is known as the Wishwilly de Suampo or Swamper. These magnificent lizards with hues of pearlescent blue and spines of light and dark live most of their lives in mangrove trees and each year the females venture to the white sandy beaches to lay their eggs. Of the three species on the island, the Utila iguana is the shyest, preferring the solitude of the swamps. Males reach a length of about 80 cm and females are about 30% smaller.

In recent years, the Utila iguana has become threatened as more and more of their habitat is consumed by development projects. To counteract this threat, the Utila Iguana Research and Breeding Station was established in 1998 to breed and head-start the iguanas, which are then released into the wild each year to bolster the population. The Station is operated by international volunteers and supported by the Frankfurt Zoological Society and Senckenberg Nature Research Society in Germany. The International Reptile Conservation Foundation (www.IRCF.org) also supports the program in the US.

If you plan to visit Utila, touring the Utila Iguana Research and Breeding Station is highly recommended. The station is about a 15-minute walk from town, offers sale of local merchandise, and provides an excellent photo opportunity. The station also provides guided tours into the swamp and along the northern coast; both areas are absolutely breathtaking and provide a wonderful opportunity to experience the

island's diverse flora and fauna." (John Binns, President, International Reptile Conservation Foundation, 3010 Magnum Drive, San Jose, CA 95135, JFB@IRCF.org, www.IRCF.org.)

Visitors to the **Utila Iguana Research and Breeding Station** are given a full tour, which includes an explanation of the habits of this endangered species and provides a general overview of Utila's wildlife. You will have an opportunity to see the swamper at different ages as well as the highlander iguana and the green iguana. Entrance fees are Lps. 40 for foreigners, Lps. 20 for Hondurans and children and Lps. 15 for student groups of more than 10 persons. Open Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 2 to 5 pm.

The black iguana is a species that only exists in the mangrove forest or swamp of Utila, which is why locals call it the "swamper." In fact, this is the only iguana in the world that inhabits mangroves, which makes it a very interesting species, particularly from an ecological point of view. Utila's mangroves only occupy three square miles (approximately 30% of the island), quite a small habitat for this species.

The iguana station also offers eco-tours of the island, to give people a sense of Utila's unique environments. I highly recommend these tours as a means of supporting local wildlife and research. For the avid eco-traveler, volunteer positions are also available. Check availability on the website, as there tends to be a waiting list. Tours require a minimum of three persons and include:

- **Pumpkin Hill:** A small hill reaching 250 feet above sea level, which offers quite an eco-challenge, even for the all-terrain hiker. The steep slope is surrounded by tall ficus and palm trees, orchids and other tropical trees and

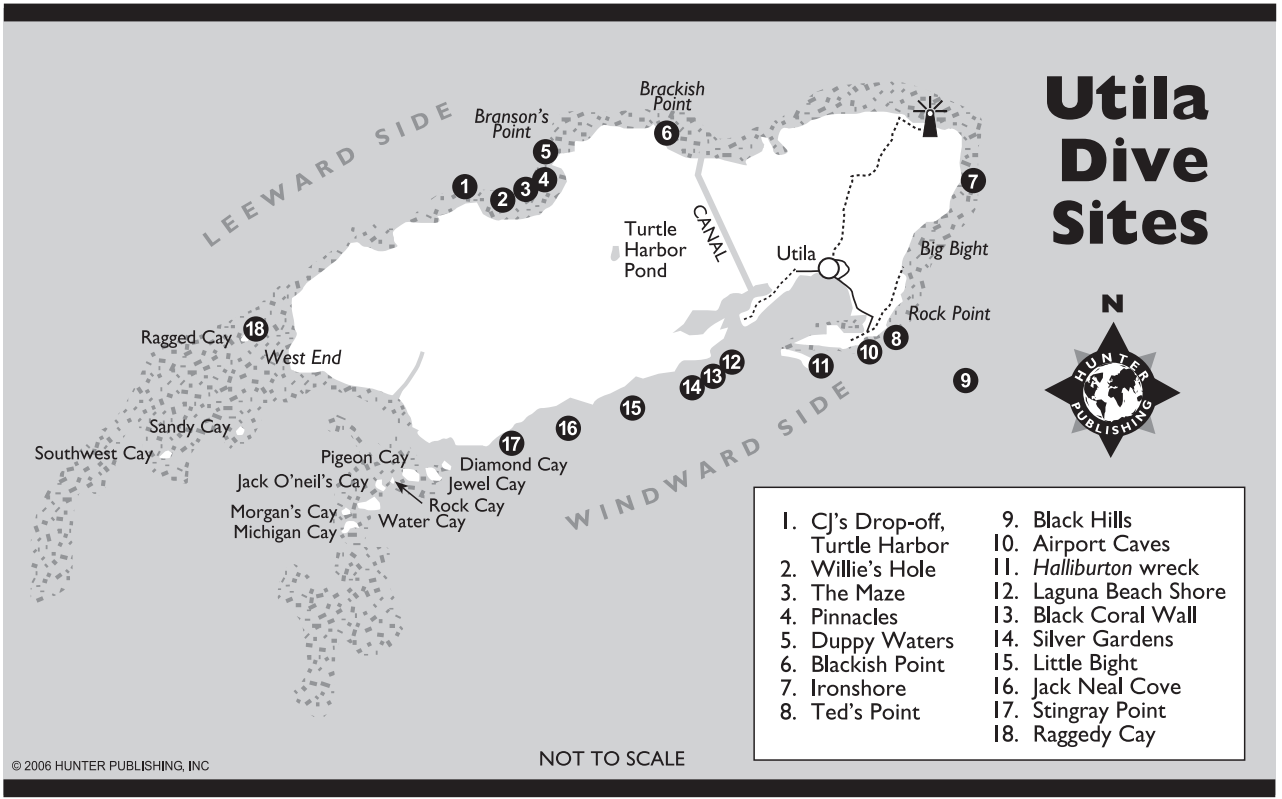
flowers. Green iguanas, highlander iguanas, boa constrictors and other wildlife are often crossing your path (no venomous snakes exist on the island). Once you've reached the summit, the whole island spreads before your eyes and even Roatán can be seen even on a fairly clouded day (Lps. 200 per person; four hours).

- **Rock Harbor:** A walk through the mangrove swamp to learn first-hand about this famous, but endangered ecosystem and its wildlife (three species of mangrove, Utila's swamper iguana, wading birds, crabs, snakes, fish, humming birds and more). Finally, you reach the beautiful Rock Harbor beach to enjoy the sun and bath in transparent water (Lps. 200 per person; five hours).
- **Iron Bound:** An exceptional walk through the tropical dry forest covered by huge trees and different palm species, which takes you to one of the most spectacular spots of the island – Iron Bound. There you can see and hear the waves crashing against the volcanic rock coast, which is quite magnificent. Close to the coast, you also see mangroves and related flora and fauna, like the Utila iguana (Lps. 150 per person; four hours).
- **Combined Rock Harbor/Iron Bound:** For people who like long walks with varying landscapes – sandy beaches, mangroves – from Rock Harbor crossing the sea by Jake's Bight Bay to Iron Bound's rocky coast and returning through Utila's dry forest. A great opportunity to see most of Utila's ecosystems and varied wildlife (Lps. 250 per person; six hours).

Adventures on Water

Diving

A 21-square-mile area around Utila offers over 100 identified dive sites for you to explore. Spectacular north side wall-diving along the continental shelf, which lies adjacent to the **Turtle Harbor Marine Reserve** and plunges over 3,000 feet into the abyss will entice any diver. Giant sponges and a wide array of soft and


Utila Dive Sites
LEEWARD SIDE
WINDWARD SIDE
Branson's Point
Brackish Point
Turtle Harbor Pond
CANAL
Utila
Big Bight
Rock Point
Ragged Cay
West End
Sandy Cay
Southwest Cay
Pigeon Cay
Diamond Cay
Jack O'neil's Cay
Jewel Cay
Rock Cay
Morgan's Cay
Water Cay
Michigan Cay
N
HUNTER PUBLISHING
1. CJ's Drop-off, Turtle Harbor
2. Willie's Hole
3. The Maze
4. Pinnacles
5. Duppy Waters
6. Blackish Point
7. Ironshore
8. Ted's Point
9. Black Hills
10. Airport Caves
11. Halliburton wreck
12. Laguna Beach Shore
13. Black Coral Wall
14. Silver Gardens
15. Little Bight
16. Jack Neal Cove
17. Stingray Point
18. Raggedy Cay
NOT TO SCALE
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hard corals as well as hawksbill turtles, eagle rays, reef sharks, moray eels, blue marlin, mackerel, dog snapper, pilot whales, dolphins and rays are but a few of the species you can expect to see. The Turtle Harbor Marine Reserve on the north side of the island boasts spectacular diving where the reef plunges into the deep blue. The area is preserved for hawksbill sea turtles, which nest on north shore beaches and are often seen swimming eerily through the reef. The north shore reef is part of the Caribbean reef system, which starts in the Yucatan and is the second-largest barrier reef in the world. You might even spot a school of dolphins and be able to swim with them in this area. The southern side of Utila provides great shallow dives through a tongue and groove coral formation to gradually sloping walls at 70 and 80 feet. Fringing reefs surround the south side and several sea mounds dot the area. South Side dive sites are a 10- to 25-minute boat ride from any dive shop and the North Side dive sites are a 45-minute ride.

Whale shark sightings are another bonus of diving on Utila. Whale sharks are usually seen around Utila from May through September. Known as the "gentle giant," the whale shark is the largest fish in the sea and can reach up to 50 feet in length. However, the whale shark is harmless to man and is very tolerant of divers. The whale shark's mouth contains 300 rows of tiny teeth, each about one inch long. But, the whale shark is a filter feeder, which means it strains food through a special structure between its gills. As it swims along, it filters mostly plankton and sometimes small crustaceans and fishes through its gills to feed.

Utila Dive Sites

● North Side

CJ's Drop Off, Turtle Harbor, (20-130 feet). This is the westernmost site in Turtle Harbor and is a true dive into the abyss as the wall here drops approximately one thousand feet to a sandy bottom. Explore the deep blue among giant barrel sponges, yellow and red rope sponges and pillar corals that are home to manta rays, reef sharks, turtles, moray eels, goatfish, porcupine-fish, Creole wrasse, snappers, jacks, grunts, spotted drum, puffers and many other species.

Duppy Waters, Turtle Bay (20-130 feet). A deep wall dive site starting at around 30 feet. Duppy means "ghost" on Utila and this seemingly bottomless wall dive is an enticing invitation to swim among the spirits of the deep. The upper reef is covered in soft corals and inhabited by colorful juvenile wrasses and corals. The drop off, which begins at about 40 feet, is home to giant barrel sponges, and large schools of grouper, yellow tail snapper and Creole wrasse as well as horse eye jacks, spiny lobster, hawksbill turtles, eagle rays, reef sharks, moray eels, barracuda, and sting rays.

Willie's Hole (15-130 feet). A vast array of coral including pinnacles, large coral heads, star corals, sea fans and rope sponges can be seen in this cavernous area full of glassy sweepers. Look for flounders, groupers, silversides, bar jacks, and manta rays along the wall that drops to 130 feet.

Pinnacles, Turtle Harbor (20-130 feet+). This is one of the best dives on Utila, with pinnacles rising from the reef wall from about 140 feet to 20 feet. A swim-through provides a dramatic descent and then exits the wall at 130 feet. West of the opening are the pinnacles. The shallow reef is home to juvenile drums, blennies, and crabs. Along the wall, you'll find fairy basslets, moray eels, stalks of black coral and barrel sponges.

Blackish Point (20-130 feet+). A spectacular cavern system with streams of sunlight shining through around 60 feet runs east-to-west along the wall and overhang, which hosts a variety of huge, colorful sponges and pillar coral. It's home to nurse sharks, grunts, porcupine fish, puffers, as well as midnight and rainbow parrotfish and tarpon.

The Maze (15-130 feet). A great variety of marine life resides in this reef system of canyons and grooves within the Turtle Bay Marine Sanctuary. Coral heads, elk horn coral, sea fans, and rope sponges abound as do flounder, rays, and grouper.

● South Side

Black Coral Wall, west of East Harbor (15-80 feet). The mirage of marine life, including black corral, found at this wall site makes it one of the better dives along the south shore. Sea fans, black coral, vase sponges, elkhorn, brain corals as well as octopus, squid, barracuda, stingrays, turtles,

yellowtail parrotfish, and the occasional moray eel hidden in the crevices can be seen. This site is recommended for night dives.

Laguna Beach Shore, west of East Harbor (15-100 feet). This dive begins about 150 yards offshore, where the wall begins at a depth of 15 feet. You'll see an abundance of juvenile fish, tunicates and stingrays, which live in the elk horn and pillar coral along the tongue and groove coral formations that lead toward the shallows. Look for the hawksbill turtles that live in the area.

Silver Gardens, west of East Harbor (15-80 feet). This is a good beginner dive with a vertical mini-wall inhabited by juvenile reef fish, horse eye jacks, groups, squid, octopus, blennies, and green morays. Another good night dive site.

Little Bight, west of East Harbor (20-100 feet), is a shallow dive running parallel to the shore with a sandy bottom that slopes to 70 feet and is flanked by 60-foot walls on both sides. It's home to garden eels, inverted anemones, sand tilefish, seahorses, and razor-fish.

Ted's Point, east side (15-130 feet), is one of the most diverse sites on Utila offering a wreck, a wall and swim-throughs. The wall drops off to about 130 feet to the east, and, to the west, the reef slopes to 60 feet. The wreck of a small sailboat lies on the sandy bottom on the south side.

Converging currents attract a rich array of marine life including morays, permits, groupers, yellow head jawfish, snappers, grunts circle, sand tilefish, garden eels, stargazers and eagle rays. Glassy sweepers swim on the sandy bottoms and among the spur-and-groove formations and wall caverns.

Jack Neal Cove, west of East Harbor (20-40 feet), is close to shore and is made up of sand channels, which are home to little creatures such as blennies, shrimp, anemones, and sea horses as well as red-fin parrotfish, trumpet fish, jacks, snapper, and grouper in the nearby walls. In the shallows, stingrays and reef squid are often seen, as is the occasional sea turtle.

***Halliburton* Wreck**, south of East Harbor (70-100 feet). This is an artificial wreck that was sunk on May 4, 1998 by the Utila Dive Operators Association. A cargo ship measuring 100

feet long and 30 feet high, the *Halliburton* lies at a depth of 100 feet on a sandy patch.

Stingray Point (20-100 feet) is near the cays and is a sandy slope that drops from 20 feet to over 100 feet, flanked by a steep wall to both the east and west. Look for southern stingrays and spotted eagle rays in the sand. An abundance of coral can been on a wall west of the slope.

Raggedy Cay (30-130 feet). This small and uninhabited cay is one of the Utila Cays and sits atop a fringing reef wall, which starts at 30 feet and drops gently to a sandy base at 130 feet. The wall hosts pillar and fan corals as well as southern stingrays, Creole wrasse, moray eel, large groupers, porcupine pufferfish and spotted eagle rays.

Black Hills (35-130 feet) is a sea mound dive off the east end of Utila which rises from the ocean floor to about 30 feet from the surface and is the favorite site of many divers. Strong sea currents attract many species to what was once a favorite fishing area. Beginners and intermediate divers can appreciate the vast amount of coral including sea fans, whips and gorgonians where huge schools of horse-eye jacks, groupers, yellowtail snappers, spadefish, Creole wrasse, Atlantic spadefish, southern sennets, and ocean triggerfish roam, as do juvenile wrasse, angelfish, turtles seahorses and the occasional whale shark. The north and southern sides of the dome drop off between 130 and 200 feet. The east and west end slope off more gently to terraces covered in coral. A must-see.

East of the airport, **Airport Caves** (12-60 feet). There are three entrances to this series of caverns from 20 to 40 feet, which are full of elk horn and stag horn coral. Large schools of sergeant majors, glassy sweepers, dog snappers. Excellent night dive for observing moray, lobster, toadfish, and octopus.

Sea Mounds (35-130 feet). Excellent shallow dives, sea mounds scattered around Utila are found at depths of 15-45 feet. Tongue-and-groove formations host an abundance of hard and soft corals as well as large schools of fish such as jacks, snappers, grouper and wrasse as well as moray eels and turtles.

Ironshore (35-130 feet) offers volcanic rock overhangs and caverns along the eastern coastline, which provide shallow dives through chimneys and blow holes as the waves break

just 20 feet above. Look for trunkfish, spotted drum, midnight parrotfish, giant king crab, and goliath groupers and rays below in the sandy bottom.

Dive Shops

Captain Morgan's Dive Center, ☎ 425-3349, captm@hondutel.hn, www.divingutila.com, is in front of the Municipal Dock, and offers PADI dive courses for as little as $199 for the Open Water Diver Certification as well as specialty and fun dives. Dive packages include six dives for $112, 10 dives for $175 and 12 dives for $210; packages of 10 or more dives can be shared. Free accommodations are included with dive courses at Hotel Kayla on the Utila Cays and just $5 with fun dives.

Cross Creek Dive Centre, ☎ 425-3334, info@crosscreek-utila.com, www.crosscreekutila.com. From Utila Municipal Dock, turn right along the main street and walk for approximately four minutes. Cross Creek Hotel is on the left side of the street. Cross Creek is a PADI Five Star Gold Palm Resort with two large (36- and 40-foot) cabin cruisers offering complete diving facilities. Single dives cost $35 and a 10-dive package is $175. Recreational courses such as Open Water Diver are $199. Dive packages are available, which include accommodations at the Cross Creek Hotel as well as Professional Packages. This is a highly recommended operation with great rates.

Günter's EcoMarine Diveshop, ☎ 425-3350, ecomar@hondutel.hn, www.riconet.de/ecomarine, is Utila's oldest dive operation. Six longtime instructors provide PADI dive courses in more than 12 languages at prices as low as $199 for an Open Water Diver certification. Classes are limited to four students per instructor which allows a safe and stress-free learning environment. Specialty courses include Underwater Digital Photography, Drift-Diving, Night-Diving, Search and Recovery, and Naturalist. Four boats offer fun dives to 85 dive sites.

The Bay Islands College of Diving (BICD), ☎ 425-3291, bicd@dive-utila.com, www.dive-utila.com, is a PADI Five Star Career Development Center founded in 1993.

From Utila Municipal Dock, turn left along the main street and walk for about five minutes. The Bay Islands College of Diving is opposite Samantha's 7-11 Store and behind the Utila Fire Station. The Dive Shop is open every day from 7 am to 6 pm and offers air-conditioned classrooms, on-site swimming pool, retail store (authorized dealer for Sherwood & ScubaPro) and a rooftop bar for after-dive drinks. Fun dives and dive certifications courses are offered and include basic Open Water Diver for $199, specialty courses from $99 through Instructor level.

Underwater Vision, ☎ 425-3103, tamara@psinet.hn, is a short walk east of the Utila Municipal Dock. The multilingual staff provides small private classes and dive courses, which include Open Water, Advanced Open Water, Rescue Diver, Dive Master, and other PADI Specialties. The shop also offers accommodation packages with Hotel Laguna Del Mar, Hotel Trudy and Hotel Trudy Suites. On-site hostel accommodations with sun deck with hammocks and weekly BBQs.

Utila Water Sports PADI Dive Center, ☎ 425-3239, dive@utilawatersports.com, www.utilawatersports.com, offers divers certification courses as well as a variety of fun dives to the north shore dive sites every morning. This center has PADI dive courses through Assistant Instructor. The Open Water Diver certification course costs $199, two fun dives are $40 or you can opt for a 10-dive package for $175. Specialty courses are offered from $75 to $150. Dive packages including accommodations at the Mansion for as little as $3 per person per night and at the Tropical Sunset Hotel for $20 for two people per night.

Where to Stay

Lodging in Utila is easy to find and ranges from a few all-inclusive resorts to budget dorm-style accommodations included with dive courses. It's usually worth paying a little more ($10-$15) for more comfortable rooms that offer private baths, hot water, a/c and a respite from heat and the sand flies.

All-Inclusive

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.	
	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	US$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

Deep Blue Resort, ☎ 425-3211, waves2222@aol.com, www.deepblueutila.com, is along the southwestern shore of Utila Island and is only reachable by boat. There is a daily boat service from Deep Blue Divers Shop, three minutes west from the Municipal Dock opposite Ferreteria Rose. The Deep Blue is a Five Star Gold Palm PADI Resort set in a private beachfront location, surrounded by coconut palms and fruit trees with indigenous wildlife and wild orchids, which accommodates a maximum of 20 guests. It has 10 spacious, deluxe rooms each with a large private balcony overlooking the sea, a/c, private bath, hot water, and refrigerator. There is a buffet breakfast, lunch, and full-service three-course evening meal. An à la carte menu is also available for a small additional charge. The bar offers cocktails, top liquor brands, local drinks, and wines. Diving packages include unlimited shore diving on three of the best south side sites, three boat dives per day and a full range of PADI courses and specialties. No phone or TV so there is minimum distraction. There is a comfortable social area where guests can chat, play games, watch videos, or just relax. Free Internet access and computer with CD burner for your photos. Inclusive package rates range from $1,044 per person per week to $2,100, depending upon time of year and number of days scuba diving. Discounts are available for non-divers.

Laguna Beach Resort, ☎ 425-3239, 378-1895, in the US 1-800-668-8452 or from outside the US 001-337-893-0013, www.utila.com, res@utila.com. Laguna Beach is an exclusive diving, fishing and beach resort set on a palm-fringed peninsula dividing a tranquil mangrove lagoon and the warm Caribbean Sea, which is only accessible by boat. Elegantly rustic bungalow-style accommodations with either king-size bed or two full-size beds include a/c, ceiling fans and private bath, hot water, and a small porch with dock. The beautiful ocean view restaurant and bar, built from natural woods, con-

tinues the resort's rustic theme and complements the island ambiance. The restaurant offers three buffet-style meals daily. There is also a full-service bar and upstairs entertainment room with a pool table and satellite TV. Amenities include laundry service, bicycle rental, island tours, fishing, snorkeling, kayaking, dive instruction, and Internet and souvenir shop. The dive operation provides dive instruction, an on-site dive shop, and three Newton custom dive boats equipped with tank racks, platform, and unique slant ladder. Boats can also be chartered for fishing, snorkeling, whale-shark excursions, and trips to the outer Cays. Dive rates run around $160 per night per person, $970 a week per person for eight days/seven nights, including airport transfer, accommodations, three buffet meals daily, three boat dives daily, two night boat dives weekly, unlimited shore dives and unlimited use of kayaks.

Utila Lodge, Utila, ☎ 425-3143, in the US 800-282-8932, info@utilalodge.com, www.utilalodge.com. This is a full-service resort with a relaxed atmosphere and modern amenities. Accommodations include eight rooms over water with double and single bed, a/c, private balcony with hammock, private bath, hot water and double sink, reading lamp, ceiling fans, cable TV and great ocean views. The hotel restaurant provides indoor/outdoor seating, a full service waterfront bar and billiards table. Other amenities include water-jet hot tub, kayak rental, high-speed Internet, fax and international telephone services. The Lodge's most outstanding feature is the **The Bay Islands College of Diving**. Utila's first PADI Five-Star Career Development Center, which offers courses from Open Water Diver all the way through Instructor and beyond. Specialty courses are offered in Nitrox diving, deep diving, wreck diving, technical ("Tec-Rec") diving and much more. For added safety, the lodge boasts a 24-hour trauma center and the island's only hyperbaric recompression chamber. Utila Lodge is also the Caribbean field station for the Shark Research Institute. The staff helps SRI with tagging whale sharks, reporting sightings, and data collection of these gentle giants. Dive package rates run around $135 to $165 per person per night and include lodging, three meals a day, three boat dives a day,

tanks, weights and belts, canoes, kayaks, welcome cocktails and airport transfers.

Moderate

$$ **Colibrí Hill Resort**, ☎ 425-3329, office@colibri-resort.com, www.colibri-resort.com, is a small, new resort in Sandy Bay. From Utila Municipal Dock, turn left along the main street and walk for approximately 10 minutes towards Sandy Bay, go past the Utila Fire Station, Community Clinic and then turn right at the Ultralight Café. Colibrí Hill Resort is on the right side of Western Path, a one-minute walk from the Café. The Colonial/Mediterranean-style three-story wooden building offers eight rooms with two double beds, private bath, hot shower, ceiling fan and/or a/c. Amenities include a tropical fruit garden and Utila's first fresh water swimming pool, restaurant, bar, cable TV, and laundry services. Large porches provide vistas of the Caribbean and Utila's lagoons. Package deals available for diving with Günter's EcoMarine and for Spanish Lessons with the Central American Spanish School. The hotel holds a weekly poolside barbecue, and also organizes horseback riding, fishing, boating and sailing tours for their guests.

$$ **Coral View Beach Resort**, ☎ 425-3783, 425-3778, 425-3155, coralviewbeachresort@yahoo.com. From the Municipal Dock, turn left into the main street, walk for about 30 minutes, past Chepe's Beach toward Blue Bayou. The Coral View Beach Resort is on the right side of the sand road just before the entrance to the lagoon. Accommodations include 18 single and double rooms with a/c, private bath, hot water. Amenities include dining area, bar, two observation decks with sea, harbor and lagoon views, reef snorkeling just 50 yards out and fishing equipment. Van and dory rentals are available for around-the-island transportation and tours.

$$-$$$ **Mango Inn**, ☎ 425 3335, in the US 1-888-322-DIVE, www.mango-inn.com, info@aquadreams.com, is on the Cola de Mico Road in beautifully-kept gardens and in the heart of Utila town. They have standard and deluxe rooms, which sleep up to four persons with double or single beds, a/c, fans, private bath, hot water, and a large communal porch with hammocks. Standard and deluxe cabins for up to four guests

with two queen-size beds, a/c, cable TV, large private bath with hot water and private porch. They offer snorkeling, diving and complimentary kayak use. The restaurant offers a full menu including vegetarian platters. There is a swimming pool with hot tub, deep end and kid's pool, bar/lounge, airport transport, book exchange and laundry service. Highly recommended all-inclusive dive packages are offered in association with the Utila Dive Center. This is about the best place to stay for a modest price in the nicest setting.

$$ **Hotel Utila**, ☎ 425-3340, hotelutila@hotmail.com, is west of the Municipal Dock on the left side of the road just past the Utila Fire Station. This hotel is in a well-maintained island-style building with 20 rooms, private baths, hot water, cable TV, fans, or a/c.

$$-$$$ **Sharkey's Reef Hotel**, ☎ 425-3212, hjackson@hondutel.hn, behind Sharkey's Reef Restaurant, is on the upper lagoon near the airstrip. This small hotel has a porch with great views of the lagoon and accommodations are set in tropical gardens and include seven rooms with a/c, fans, private bath with hot water, and cable TV. Some have kitchens. Recommended.

Budget

$$ **Annie Marelli B&B**, Western Path, ☎ 425-3916. From the municipal dock turn left into the main street and walk toward Sandy Bay for approximately 10-15 minutes until you reach the UltraLight Café. At the UltraLight Café, turn right onto Western Path and walk for another five minutes past the Colibrí Hill Resort to the end of the Western Path. There are 20 rooms with double bed and fans; 16 have an additional single bed. Amenities include garden area with sun deck and ocean views, dining room, kitchen, and bicycles.

$ **Backpackers Lodge**, ☎ 425-3350, ecomar@hondutel.hn, is in Günter's EcoMarine Dive Shop opposite the Sea Side Inn about a 15-minute walk west from the Municipal Dock. They have dormitory rooms with bunk beds and eight private rooms with double beds.

$-$$ **Bayview Hotel**, ☎ 425-3114, in the US 423-443-4143, is about 10 minutes west of the pier opposite the UltraLight Restaurant. This small and basic hotel offers nine different

accommodations, ranging from apartments with kitchen to single rooms. All the rooms have more than one bed and a private bath. But not all have hot water. Be sure to ask if hot showers are a priority for you. There is outdoor oceanfront seating and an Internet café that offers international Internet phone calls. Discounts are available for longer stays.

$-$$ **Cooper's Inn**, ☎ 425-3184, east of the pier toward the airport, offers varied budget lodgings that include dormitory accommodations with a shared kitchen, double rooms in the new house at the back, and private cabins with living room, full kitchen and two bedrooms.

$ **Cross Creek Hotel & Dive Center**, ☎ 425-3334, info@crosscreekutila.com, www.crosscreekutila.com. From Utila Municipal Dock, turn right along the main street and walk for approximately four minutes. Cross Creek Hotel is on the left side of the street. Accommodations at this new hotel include 14 standard rooms (two with a/c) that sleep two people on either two single beds or one double bed with private shower, shared toilet, large fans and TV. Standard rooms share a large deck with hammocks and oceans view. Four cabañas ($50-80 for the cabaña) sleep up to four people with two double beds, private bath, hot water, a/c, TV, refrigerator and private balcony. Also available is the famous Dive Master House for Dive Masters-In-Training with eight single rooms and shared bathroom facilities. Dive packages available with the Cross Creek Dive Centre and Spanish lessons with the Central America Spanish School. Amenities include an air-conditioned lounge with a satellite television system with 100+ channels, a shared kitchen, and the Looney Lagoon Bar & Restaurant.

$-$$ **Margaritaville Beach Hotel**, ☎ 425-3366, margaritavillehotel@yahoo.com, is on the seafront about a 10-minute walk from the dock, opposite the Driftwood Restaurant and Bar, just before Chepe's Beach. Accommodations are in a two-story building with upstairs and downstairs corridors/porches, including 16 clean and large rooms with private bath and fan. Some have a/c.

$ **Rubi's Inn**, ☎ 425-3240, is east of the main dock. Rubí and her husband are very friendly hosts and their new two-story wooden building offers eight rooms with one double bed and

one single bed, some with a/c. The accommodations are comfortable, clean, and airy with fans and tiled bathrooms with hot water. Some rooms have a/c and kitchen facilities are available. Recommended.

$ **Seaside Inn**, ☎ 425-3150, is about a 15-minute walk from the dock opposite Günter's Dive Shop. This family-style hotel offers basic, clean rooms with fans, some with private bath and a/c.

$-$$ **Tropical Hotel**, ☎ 425-3568. From the Municipal Dock turn left into the main street and walk toward Sandy Bay for approximately 10 minutes. At the Utila Fire Station, turn right into Mamey Lane. The Hotel is on the left side of the road just behind Rose's Supermarket. There are 18 rooms, all with private bath, hot water, TV and fan. Larger apartments have two rooms and a kitchen. Dive packages available with Utila Water Sports PADI Dive Center that include front-dock pick-up for morning dives.

$-$$ **Trudy's**, ☎ 425-3103, tamara@psinet.hn, is east of the dock and offers 24 large rooms of varying sizes and comfort levels, some with private bath. Accommodations are free for divers taking courses with Underwater Vision Dive Shop.

$ **Backpackers Lodge**, ☎ 425-3350, ecomar@hondutel.hn, is in Günter's EcoMarine Dive Shop opposite the Sea Side Inn about a 15-minute walk west from the Municipal Dock. Dormitory rooms with bunk beds and eight private rooms with double beds.

$ **Cross Creek Hotel & Dive Center**, ☎ 425-3334, info@crosscreekutila.com, www.crosscreekutila.com. From Utila Municipal Dock, turn right along the main street and walk for about four minutes. Cross Creek Hotel is on the left side of the street. There are 14 standard rooms (two with a/c) that sleep two people on either two single beds or one double bed, with private shower, shared toilet, large fans and TV. Standard rooms share a large deck with hammocks and ocean view. Four cabañas ($50-$80 for the cabaña) sleep up to four people with two double beds, private bath, with hot water, a/c, TV, refrigerator and private balcony. There is also the famous Dive Master House for Dive Masters-In-Training only, which offers eight single rooms with shared bathroom facilities.

Dive packages available with the Cross Creek Dive Centre and Spanish lessons with the Central America Spanish School. Amenities include an air-conditioned lounge with a satellite television system, a shared kitchen, and the Looney Lagoon Bar & Restaurant.

Rentals

Slumberland Villas, www.slumberlandutila.com, losbreeze@utila-net.com, are located between the sea and the lagoon, on top of the best diving and snorkeling spots of Utila and a calm fisherman's paradise, 10 minutes away from Utila town. These are beautifully finished wooden structures on stilts over the ocean with wrap-around decks. Each has air-conditioned bedrooms and a huge living room with a unique chimney system that allows hot air to escape from the top and lets the steady breeze from the sea cool down the interior of the open house. This is an ideal rental for families and groups of one to five persons. Villa rental rates for a two-bedroom, one-bathroom unit that sleeps four to five people are about $150 a day and include housecleaning, bicycles and a/c. A four-passenger golf cart is available for an additional $30/day. Slumberland has an association with Bay Islands College of Diving and offers special dive package rates. Low season rates are also offered.

Where to Eat

As on all the Bay Islands, finding a good meal is easy. Fresh seafood is always easy to come by and a few places offer meat specialties for the steak craver. A few places cater to vegetarians and local fast food, such as *baleadas* and *pastelitos* (meat pies) can be had almost all day.

DINING PRICE CHART

Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.

$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

The **Baleadas Stand** is at the end of the pier. *Baleadas* are warm flour tortillas filled with refried beans and cream and

usually cost Lps. 5 apiece. Great for a fast and energy building breakfast.

$$ **Bundu Café** east of the dock on main street is one of the more popular travelers' hangouts. This funky coffee shop offers cappuccino, espresso, latte, mocha, regular coffee and light foods such as delicious crêpe and baguette sandwiches, quiches and a daily lunch special. Best book exchange in town, as well as a good source of information on local tours such as boat trips to Water Cay. Open Monday through Saturday from 7 am to 3 pm, but ask about the evening movie.

$$ **Café Mango** is an open-restaurant at Hotel Mango Inn and offers a varied menu, which includes Italian-style pastas, traditional Caribbean dishes and a great selection of delicious thin-crust Italian pizzas wood-fired in a brick oven. Open from 6:30 am Tuesday to Saturday, Sundays from noon to 10 pm.

$ **Delany's Kitchen**, in Cooper's Inn on main street, east of the pier, ☎ 425-3184. This restaurant offers typical island-style platters, daily specials, and very good pizza and lasagna.

$ **Golosinas Glady's** offers local fast food such as *baleadas* and *pastelitos de carne* (fried meat-filled cakes) as well as typical breakfast, lunch and dinner. Try her banana bread, brownies, and coconut bread. Open Monday to Saturday from 6 am to 9 pm.

$$ **Jade Seahorse**, Cola de Mico Road. The Art Deco atmosphere set in tropical gardens at this restaurant is truly unique and includes island antiques and marine paraphernalia. The varied menu offers good breakfasts, seafood platters, and fresh fruit shakes. Open daily 7 am to 3 pm and 5-10 pm.

$ **Island Café**, ☎ 445-3258, in front of the Coco Loco, west of the pier, offers generous portions of island-style food at reasonable prices. The à la carte menu offers fried fish, scrumptious sautéed lobster tails, fish-burgers, as well as local-style chicken, beef and pork platters.

$-$$ **La Piccola - Kate's Italian Restaurant**, ☎ 425-3746, is west from pier, just past J&B Carniceria. The owner/chef offers authentic Italian cuisine prepared with ingredients she imports from Italy, served in either an outdoor candlelight or

covered eating area. Entrées include pastas, steaks (a mouth-watering filet mignon), and fresh fish. She also offers a backpacker menu, which includes platters such as spaghetti al pesto with bread. Open from Wednesday to Sunday 5-10 pm. Well-stocked wine bar.

$ **Looney Lagoon Bar & Restaurant** is at Crosscreek Hotel. The restaurant offers fresh seafood and Mexican-style food with varying daily specials including gumbo, lasagna, and hearty curries from an open-air, over-the-water deck. Full bar service and good music. Open Monday to Saturday from 6-9:30 pm

Mango Tree Gelateria and Espresso Bar, west of the pier, offers a variety of flavors of gelato ice cream as well as espresso, cappuccino, café latte. Snacks offered include breakfast muffins and biscuits as well as calzone for lunch. Enjoy a respite from the heat in their air-conditioned indoor seating or people-watch from the outdoor deck overlooking the main street.

$ **Media Luna Restaurant** is west of the dock on the left-hand side of the road and next door to the Tranquila Bar. This restaurant with indoor/outdoor seating offers a large breakfast, lunch and dinner menu and specialty platters of grilled meats and fresh seafood.

$-$$ **Munchie's**, ☎ 425-3168, is in the Island House a couple of minutes west of the Dock. The historic wooden architecture and the backyard iguana garden lend a relaxed island atmosphere. The wrap-around porch has high ceilings and is a pleasant place to enjoy a meal. This restaurants offers a hearty breakfast from 6 am and to-go tacos and burritos for those in a hurry to catch their dive boats. This is a good place to go for a snack of nachos, a sandwich, and even a cheeseburger! Lunch and dinner entrées include conch soup, grilled shrimp, and lobster, or a delicious chicken dish served on banana leaves. Check out the "Traveler's Message and Information Board" on the front of the building, You'll find information about trail rides into the bush, cave tours, day-trips to cays, or fishing or sailing specials; notes from other travelers; and local merchants will often leave discount coupons. Open daily from 6 am to 9 pm.

$ **Thompson's Bakery**, Cola de Mico Road, is one of the best places on Utila for breakfast. Try the pancakes, delicious cinnamon rolls, or an omelet with warm biscuits to start out your day. Open daily.

$ **UltraLight Restaurant**, ☎ 425-3201, is a covered open-air space overlooking the main street of Utila a 10- or 15-minute walk west of the municipal dock opposite Ramon's Services. This unique island restaurant offers authentic Israeli cuisine and vegetarian dishes freshly prepared and cooked on the premises using both traditional and modern Israeli recipes. They use falafel and humus imported from Israel and home-made pita bread. Open for breakfast lunch and dinner, Sunday to Thursday from 7 am to 8 pm, Friday 7 am to 4 pm, closed Saturday.

$ **Zanzibar Café**, east of the pier, is a small family restaurant open for breakfast and lunch. The breakfasts are good and include fruit salads and pancakes. Typical island-style and vegetarian platters are offered for lunch. The fried fish platter is definitely a good deal. Open daily until 4 pm.

$-$$ **RJ's Barbeque Grill** is near the bridge toward the airport. This popular eatery offers an enormous T-bone steak and other grilled specialties, including chicken, pork and excellent seafood at very modest prices. It fills up rapidly after they open at 5 pm for dinner only on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday.

Nightlife

The **Reef Cinema** shows two or three movies a week, which are usually fairly recent releases, with air-conditioning, popcorn and sodas.

Bundu Cinema shows a different movie every evening.

Coco Loco, a dockside bar with a thatched roof, is undoubtedly the place to head for a sunset cocktail. Open daily from 4 pm, the dock, which doubles as a dance floor, is usually packed with both visitors and local expats chugging their favorite drink. Very informal atmosphere. Closed Sundays.

The Treetanic Bar at the Jade Seahorse is a fun place to go. The bar is on an elevated wooden deck with the form of an old

pirate ship under an enormous mango tree. The shade and constant trade winds provide a cool respite from the heat and a nice place to enjoy a drink from a good selection of domestic and international drinks.

Bar in the Bush, as the name implies, is in the bush. Take a 10-minute walk from town on the airport road past the Mango Tree. This open-air club with a volleyball court only opens on Friday and doesn't close until the wee hours. The informal party atmosphere attracts a diverse crowd of fun lovers.

Tranquila Bar plays a wide variety of music and offers local beer, cocktails and shooters. Open daily 3-12 pm. Happy hour is from 3 to 7 pm.

The Utila Cays

The Utila Cays are a collection of tiny islands. Some of the cays are privately owned and the two main Cays, Pigeon and Jewel Cay, are inhabited by local fishermen. The Cays retain a true Caribbean charm and are worth visiting just for a view of the original architecture. There are foot paths meandering past well-maintained homes on stilts.

There are a few places to stay and eat on the Cays. V**icky's Rooms** run about $5 a night and are very basic. **Susan's restaurant** is the oldest and most popular eatery on the cays and offers the best fish burgers. Both are on Jewel Cay.

You can also camp out on Water Cay, a beautiful expanse of white sand surrounded by warm Caribbean waters, but you must bring your own provisions. Don't forget your insect repellent! Entrance to Water Cay is Lps. 25 per person. Transportation to the Cays usually leaves from the first small dock west of the Municipal Dock and costs $1-$2. Ask anyone standing there if Donald Cooper is arriving or leaving soon. Donald usually makes two trips a day. You can also charter a small boat or dory from the hardware store, but the cost is considerably higher.

■ Guanaja

Guanaja is about 15 miles long and 2½ miles wide and is the tallest of the Bay Islands with one peak reaching nearly 1,500

feet. At 40 miles from the coast, it is also the farthest from the Honduran mainland and hence the most secluded.

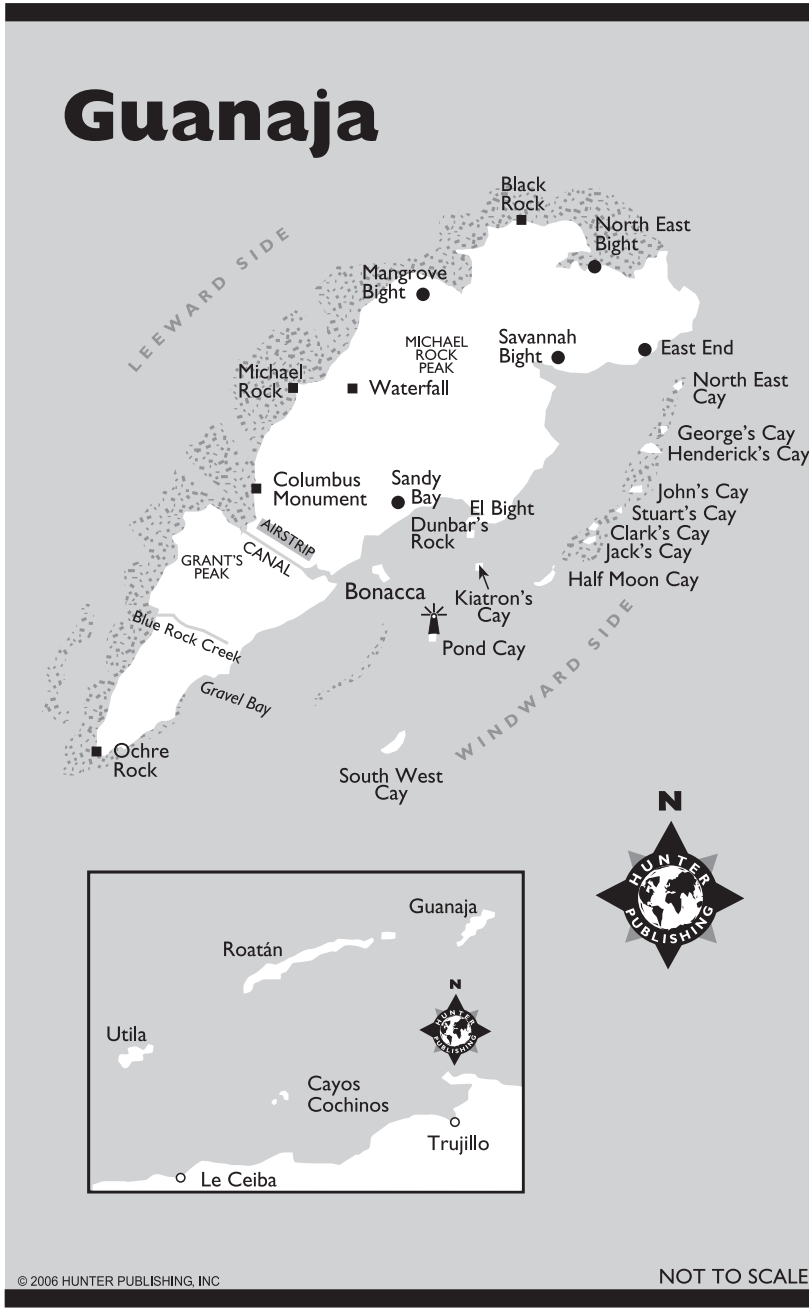
Christopher Columbus landed on Guanaja in 1502 and dubbed it "Island of Pines" due to the predominance of pine trees. The island was heavily forested with native pine and tropical growth before Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Unfortunately, two days in the eye of the hurricane destroyed most of the vegetation, but reforestation projects are helping the island to recover slowly. At the same time, large stands of mangroves did remain largely intact and an access channel through the mangrove forest divides eastern and western Guanaja, which provides faster access to the west side of the island. While there are two small communities, **Mangrove Bight** and **Savannah Bight**, around the island, most of the population inhabits a small cay, **Bonacca** or "Guanaja Town."

Neither the cay nor the main island has a paved road and the only mode of transportation is by boat, adding to the island's natural Caribbean charm. The island boasts both sandy and rock beaches. The entire island is surrounded by a pristine fringing reef providing great diving and snorkeling from nearly anywhere.

Getting There & Getting Around

The easiest way to get to Guanaja is to fly from La Ceiba. Small boats meet all the flights at the airstrip, which is on the main island and charge about $2 to transport you to Bonacca. Most of the resorts provide airport transfers if you make prior arrangements. The best place to anchor in Guanaja is in Sandy Bay and the Bight.

Bonacca is the island's commercial center and is where you will find the only bank, the larger stores, as well as various eateries and accommodations. Most of the buildings in Bonacca are built on stilts alongside a maze of wooden boardwalks that crisscross the cay and narrow channels.



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NOT TO SCALE

Practicalities

Banking

Banco Atlántida exchanges traveler's checks and gives cash advances on Visa cards. Open Monday to Friday from 8 to 11:30 am and from 1:30 to 4 pm; on Saturday from 8 to 11:30 am.

Adventures on Shore

Numerous trails cut across the main island of Guanaja providing hikes through lush tropical landscapes over mountains offering spectacular views and of the ocean and reef surrounding Guanaja. The most popular trail leads from the airport to **Michael's Rock Beach** and another 30 minutes to **Michael's Peak**, which is the highest mountain on the island, and **Big Gully Falls**, a beautiful mountain cascade. Some of the nicest beaches are near Bo's Beach House Hotel, providing a nice place for a day of beach sun and fun. You can also rent a bicycle or scooter and wander farther afield.

Adventures on Water

Diving

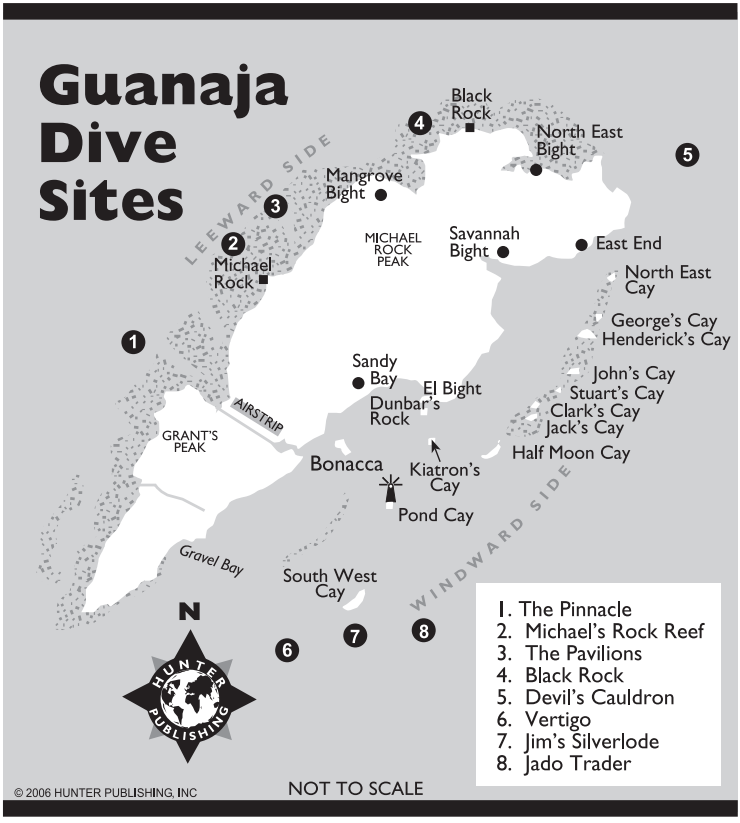
Diving off the unspoiled reef surrounding Guanaja provides the opportunity to explore a variety of sites, which include wrecks, spur and groove reef formations, mysterious caves and tunnels, underwater volcanoes, and plunging reef walls. The entire reef system has been designated a National Marine Park by the Honduran government to ensure its protection and conservation. On July 30, 2001, President Ricardo Maduro inaugurated the **Mestizo Reef**, which commemorates Christopher Columbus' landing on Guanaja 500 years ago. The site, which is 65 feet underwater, boasts two life-size busts, one of Christopher Columbus and another of Lempira, the famous Honduran chieftain, as well as shipwreck replicas of a 16th-century bell and two cannons.

Dive Sites

Guanaja has over 50 dive sites, the most famous being the Jado Trader, Black Rock, Jim's Silverlode and the Devil's Cauldron. Below you'll find a short list of Guanaja dive sites, including these.

The Pinnacle (10-130 feet+). A wall dive off the north shore of Guanaja where the pinnacle rises from about 135 feet to 50 feet. Black corral can be seen attached to the pinnacle at about 80 feet. Barrel sponges, azure vase sponges and gorgonian are seen along the wall, as are grouper, yellow-tailed snapper, and blue chromis.

The Pavilions (30-60 feet). This spectacular dive near Michael's Rock through a coral maze of tunnels and outcroppings is a favorite of both divers and snorkelers. In the



shallows, you'll find azure vase sponges and red rope sponges. Search for shrimp and lobster in the crevices. There are barracuda, angelfish, yellow-tail snapper, red-tail snappers, Creole wrasse and eels.

Michael's Rock Reef (30-130 feet). This site has a natural crack in the reef that drops to 180 feet. Search for the nudibranches in the cracks and crevices as well as vase and rope sponges. Lobster, green moray eels, spotted and goldentail eels and Creole wrasse are common in this area. Check for brittle stars and arrow crabs down inside sponges.

Jim's Silverlode (50-130 feet). This is one of Guanaja's most famous dives. A sheer wall off the Southwest Cay hosts huge sponges and soft corral; a gap in the reef branches out into caverns and tunnels. The dive leads you through a tunnel full of silver side sardines at 70 feet that exits into a natural cathedral full of pretty fish. It's a favorite fish-feeding spot for grouper and yellowtail snappers, which often follow divers in search of a handout.

Black Rock (15-90 feet). Another favorite, this site, also known as Tito's Labyrinth, was created by volcanic action and extends from the shallows through a gigantic black rock formation of caves, tunnels, and swim-throughs. Make sure you have a flashlight, as some areas are not penetrated by the sun. A wide array of hard and soft corals are visible, as are parrotfish, nurse sharks, eagle rays, jewfish, lobster, shrimp, and moray eels.

Devil's Cauldron (30-130 feet+). A famous fish-spawning canyon six miles northeast of the island. During January and February Nassau and tiger grouper spawn in the area. Also seen here are triggerfish, durgon, snapper, grunts, and jacks.

Vertigo (25-120 feet). This site features a narrow coral ridge flanked by open water on both sides with peculiar angles that can make you lose your sense of direction. The wall begins at about 35 feet and drops dramatically. Large tunnels allow you to swim in and out of the wall and observe an array of sponges, including deep-water gorgonians and giant barrel sponges, as well as rare black crinoids, white crinoids, queen angelfish, grouper, trumpetfish, and even black tip sharks.

Jado Trader (45-110 feet). The *Jado Trader* is a 240-foot freighter lying on its starboard side at 100 feet and surrounded by pinnacles that rise to 50 feet. The adjacent wall offers a chimney swim-through where moray eels, jewfish, and grouper as well as shrimp and lobster are seen.

Kayaking, Sailing, Fishing & Island Boat Tours

Since this is an island, kayaking, fishing, snorkeling, and diving are the de rigueur activities. Bone fishing is popular on the flats of the south shore and, in most places, you can snorkel from shore. Local boatmen charge about $20-25 to take you snorkeling or fishing. Most of the resorts either provide diving or can make arrangements for you to take part in water activities.

The Hilton Hotel, ☎ 453-4469, offers boat charters.

Kayaking is also readily available and several kayaking tours are available from the hotels.

Where to Stay

Accommodations on Guanaja are varied and range from small budget hotels to a few all-inclusive dive resorts, but don't expect luxury, just beautiful surroundings. Most of the least expensive hotels are found on Bonacca Cay.

$$$ **Graham's Place**, ☎ 453-4498, www.islaguanaja.com, is on a private cay in the midst of a reef. This tiny cay hotel surrounded by coral reef and crystal-clear waters offers a lovely setting for a peaceful getaway. Accommodations include four rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and fans. Amenities include the beach, restaurant, bar, grill, house cleaning, laundry, snorkeling, fishing, and airport transfers. The cost of $100 a day per person includes breakfast, lunch and transfers.

$ **Hotel Miller**, Bonacca, one block from the municipal pier on the corner, ☎ 453-4327, fax 453-4202 offers 29 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c and cable TV. Amenities include hotel restaurant and satellite Internet.

$$ **Hotel Hilton**, Guanaja Airport, ☎ 453-4469, offers three rooms with private bath and cable TV and an oceanfront bar and restaurant.

$-$$ **Hotel Nights Inn**, ☎ 453-4465. Small, family-run place with very clean and comfortable, spacious rooms, all with cable TV and a/c.

$ **Hotel Rosario**, ☎ 453-4240, on Bonacca, offers five rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, fan, and cable TV.

All-Inclusive

$$$$ **End of the World Resort**, Michael Rock Beach, ☎ 991-0913, in the US 941-375-0257, www.guanaja.com, is at the north side of Guanaja on a secluded three-mile white sand beach and offers a variety of activities. Accommodations include five wooden cabañas that can lodge up to 12 people. The cabañas are on the beach and on the mountainside. All have a great view, a queen-size bed, and a single bed, private bath with hot water, fan, and terrace. Laundry and e-mail service are also available. Resort amenities include a beachfront restaurant, tiki bar, dive shop/diver training facility, private mooring dock, fishing charters, watersport rentals, hiking to the waterfall and in the nearby forest, beachfront snorkeling, and a two-story clubhouse with breathtaking sunsets. Honeymoon, kayaking, diving, and fishing packages from about $100 a day per person are available. For a fun-packed vacation away from it all, this is the best place to stay on Guanaja.

$$$$ **West Peak Inn**, West End Beach, ☎ 377-6144, www.westpeakinn.com, westpeak@vena.com, has a beautiful location on the west end of Guanaja and specializes in kayaking. The cabins are back from the beach at the foot of the hillside. Each cabin has a private bath, a double, or twin beds, fan and mesh screened porch. The hotel restaurant and bar is open to the public and a favorite Sunday get-together place with locals for the Sunday hog roasts. This hotel is actually part of a farm and some of the food is grown there. Guests can even pick bananas, mangos, and other fruit right off the trees. Snorkeling is available from the shore, but diving is only available for experienced divers. Dive courses can be arranged with other dive operations on the island. Kayak packages are available.

$$-$$$ **Bo's Island House**, ☎ 991-0913, fax 453-4146, www.bosislandhouse.com, is on a north shore beach and consists of a main house and two guesthouses, which accommodate a maximum of 12 people. The comfortable rooms are of island-style architecture with louvered windows, Spanish tile floors, and have balconies with ocean views. Each has a double bed or single beds, with private bath, hot water, and fan. The restaurant/bar is on the dock and is a great place to watch a spectacular Caribbean sunset. A large menu offers local and international platters. Activities include diving and snorkeling, with a restaurant, and bar. Airport transport, diving equipment rental, grocery store stop, meal plan, and all-inclusive packages are also offered. Dive packages and meal plans available.

$$$$$ **The Dunbar Rock Villa**, ☎ 453-4506, is a lovely and unique hotel on a small cay off Utila. With only four rooms accommodating up to eight people, small dive groups and privacy are assured. Accommodations include private bath, hot water, fan, and spectacular ocean views. No more than two adults and two toddlers are allowed per room. Seven-night packages run around $1,000 plus tax per diver, double occupancy, and include five days with three boat dives and the one-day of two boat dives, three meals a day and one free night dive.

Where to Eat

Dina's Reef House Restaurant & Bar, ☎ 453-4538, is a very typical over-the-water eatery offering typical island-style platters and fast food and seafood. She also has a small marine corral with turtles and fish. Open Monday to Friday from noon to 12 am, Saturday and Sunday from noon to 2 am.

$$-$$$ **Graham's Place** offers excellent specialty island platters featuring fresh seafood and is open from 7 am to 10 pm daily. Full-service bar.

$$$ **The End of the World Resort** has a full-service beachfront bar and restaurant, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner with Saturday and Sunday seafood barbecues. This restaurant is within walking distance of the Big Gully Waterfalls,

which provides the opportunity for a fun hike followed by lunch or dinner.

$$-$$$ **Bo's Bar and Restaurant**, Bo's Island House, on the north shore, is at the end of the dock on the hotel's beach.

$$ **West Peak Inn**, West End Beach, is open for lunch and dinner with a daily menu, usually based on the daily catch. They also offer Sunday barbecues.

$$-$$$ **Pirates Den Bar and Restaurant**, Bonacca, ☎ 453-4308. This restaurant offers a variety of island-style platters as well as daily lunch specials. Open daily 8 am to 2 pm and 5:30-9:30 pm. All-day Friday barbecue including draft beer.

$$-$$$ **Mexi-Treats Mexican Restaurant**, Bonacca, ☎ 453-4170. This air-conditioned restaurant specializes in Mexican platters and also offers lunch specials. Open Monday to Friday 8 am to 1:30 pm and 6 to 9:30 pm. Saturday and Sundays from 6 am to 10 pm.

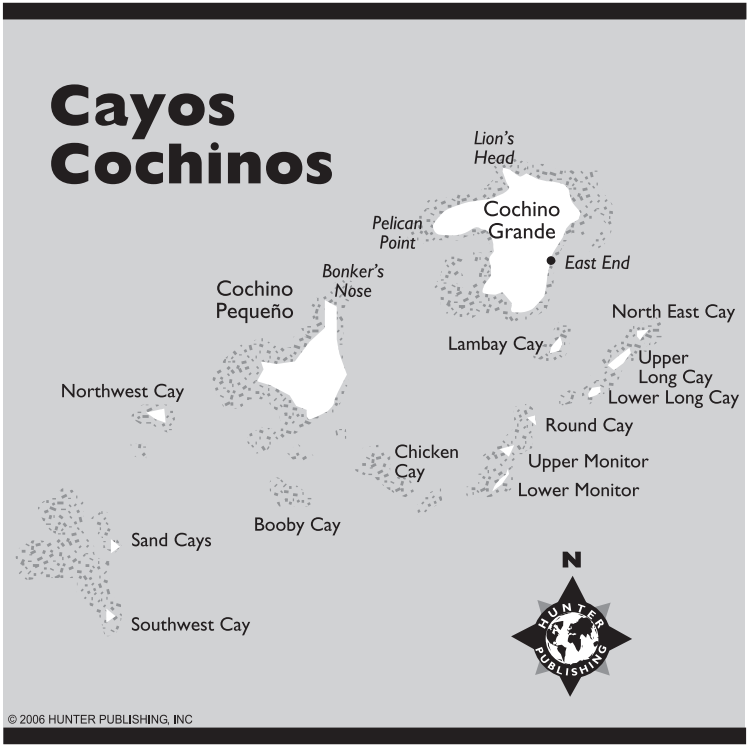
$-$$$ **The Best Stop Restaurant and Bakery**, Bonacca. This popular restaurant with open-air seating offers fresh baked breads and pastries as well as fast foods, including submarine sandwiches. Open Monday to Friday from 7 am to 10 pm, Saturday and Sunday from 6:30 to 11 pm.

■ Cayos Cochinos

Paradise Untouched

The pristine Cayos Cochinos (Hog Islands) are about 19 miles (30 km) northeast of the coast of La Ceiba. This small archipelago is made up of two islands – Cochino Grande and Cochino Pequeño – and 13 small coral cays, which are surrounded by spectacular, untouched reefs offering some of the best diving and snorkeling found in Honduras. The larger islands have heavily forested hills and are ringed by beautiful white sand beaches that lead into clear waters.

Described by some as "paradise on earth," the cays make for a fun day-trip or a secluded and idyllic vacation of diving, snorkeling, sea kayaking, hiking, and bird-watching. In 1993, the Cayos Cochinos were designated a Marine Protected Area and in 2003 they were declared a Marine Natural Monument,



with the Honduras Coral Reef Foundation (HCRF) administering the conservation of the area. As this area is protected, anchoring on the coral and commercial fishing are prohibited, which has allowed the reef to remain intact.

Although Cayos Cochinos are closest to the mainland, they are the hardest islands to get to since the area is protected – there is no airport, anchoring is prohibited and facilities are few.

Getting There

From La Ceiba

The only way to get to Cayos Cochinos is by boat. From the coast, you should plan on leaving in the early morning when the ocean is calmer and the possibility of taking off is greater.

If you stay at the **Plantation Beach Resort**, ☎ 442-0974, on Cochino Grande (Big Hog Island), will provide direct passage via a motorboat from the Muelle de Cabotaje in La Ceiba. You can also try and find a boat to take you from the Muelle de Cabotaje, which usually costs about $100 round-trip (remember to bargain).

Plantation Beach Resort also has a weekly transportation service with a jet boat leaving the resort at 9 am on Saturdays. The return from La Ceiba's Muelle de Cabotaje is a week later at about 5 pm. The cost of the transfer is $30 one-way.

From Nueva Armenia

Boat transportation to the Cayos is available from Nueva Armenia, a Garífuna village on the coast about 25 miles (40 km) from La Ceiba. To get to Nueva Armenia from La Ceiba, you caneither hie a taxi ($5) or take the bus (two hours), which you can catch at the terminal at 11:30 am and 3:15 pm daily. Nonetheless, rough currents oftenprevent boat departuresin the afternoon and you may have to overnight in Nueva Armenia. If you drive, take the rad east out of La Ceiba toward Trujillo to Jutiapa (20 miles/32 km), which is a large town on thehighway. From Jutiapa, turn left and follow the dirt road (five miles/eight km) to Nueva Armenia. Several people offer boat rides (two hours one-way) on simple fishing boats for about $40 round-trip. Faster motorboats are more expensive, but they make the trip in about half an hour. The most reliable and highly recommended is **Rene Arzu**. Rene has several motor boats and motorized dugout canoes. Rene's sister has a small basic hotel and can put you up and arrange for food as well at very inexpensive rates.

Day-Trips to Cayos Cochinos

La Champa Restaurant offers boat trips from Sambo Creek for about $50 per person.

Garífuna Tours offers daily departures from their offices in La Ceiba at 7 am. From there you'll be driven to the Palma Real Resort, where tourists board the boat for the short 45-minute tour to Cayos at 8 am. Return is scheduled to arrive back in La Ceiba at 3 pm.

Day-Trips on the Weekends

The ***Princesa*** departs La Ceiba on Saturday and Sunday mornings for a visit to Cayos Cochinos, which includes a light lunch for $65 per person. **Zenia Paz**, who can be found at the Mango Tango Restaurant, ☎ 440-2091, in the Zona Viva of La Ceiba can provide more information and help you book a tour. Reservations are required with a minimum of 48 hours to insure the departures.

Adventures on Foot

Hiking

Hiking is possible on Cochino Grande, home to Plantation Beach Resort. Trails meander through hilly tropical forest up to the highest summit at nearly 500 feet (145 m) and a lighthouse, from where you can enjoy a spectacular 360 degree view.

Adventures on Water

Snorkeling

Don your mask and fins and jump in the water just about anywhere for a view of spectacular marine life.

Diving

Plantation Beach Resort offers all-inclusive dive packages for about $900 (taxes included) for seven days and six nights.

Several dive resorts and dive shops in Roatán offer dive trips to Cayos Cochinos, including the following. **Anthony's Key Resort**, Sandy Bay, ☎ 445-3003,www.aanthonyskey.com, akr@anthonyskey.com; **Sueño del Mar Dive Center**, West End, ☎ 403-8817, www.suenodelmar.com; and **Subway Water Sports**, Brick Bay, ☎ 387-0579, 386-8260, www.subwaywatersports.com, info@subwaywatersports.com.

Sightseeing

Scientific Expeditions

Cochino Menor is the operations and research base of the Marine Natural Monument of Cayos Cochinos, and there are laboratories, cabins where scientists, park rangers, and navy personnel, who manage and guard the protected area, are housed. Student groups are offered room (bunk house) and board here for about $35 a day, but they must also work during their stay.

Honduras Coral Reef Fund, Cochino Menor, ☎ 443-4075, 443-4076, www.cayoscochinos.org, aeoviedo@cayoscochinos.org, offers participation (labor-intensive) in scientific expeditions, which form part of a survey program to provide data on the current biological status of the reefs and islands and of protected species within the marine protected area. Check availability at www.biosphere-expeditions.org/expeditions/honduras.htm.

Culture

Visit the Garífuna community on Chachauate Cay for a taste of Garífuna dancing and food.

Where to Stay

The **Plantation Beach Resort**, ☎ 442-0974, in the US ☎ 1-800-628-3723, www.cayosochinos.com, pbr@laceiba.com. For a long time, Plantation Beach Resort was the only resort, bar, and restaurant on the Cayos. The resort is on a small beach on Cochino Mayor and is the only diving resort in the Cayos. PBR owns the entire island and offers accommodations for up to 24 people in 12 comfortable cabins with ocean views that are scattered on the hillside. Guests have even included movie stars like Cameron Diaz earlier this year. Activities include hiking, snorkeling, diving, sea kayaking, and bird-watching. The hotel restaurant prepares great food – fresh seafood platters, fresh bread and pastries baked daily.

Extremely basic budget accommodations are available in the Garífuna community on Chachauate Cay, where there is no running water and no electricity. The Garífuna will provide meals and they have a basic hut set up for visitors where you

can sling your hammock for the night. Families can also put you up in their lofts. Meals and accommodations usually don't cost more than $5 each.

Yachters

Plantation Beach Resort is very yacht-friendly and yachters can radio in (call Trinity on VHF Channel 12) to make a reservation for lunch, dinner, and cocktails. The food is great and there is an extensive bar. Buoys are provided for anchoring to protect the reef. Otherwise, anchoring on the reef here is illegal.

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Copán & the Western Highlands

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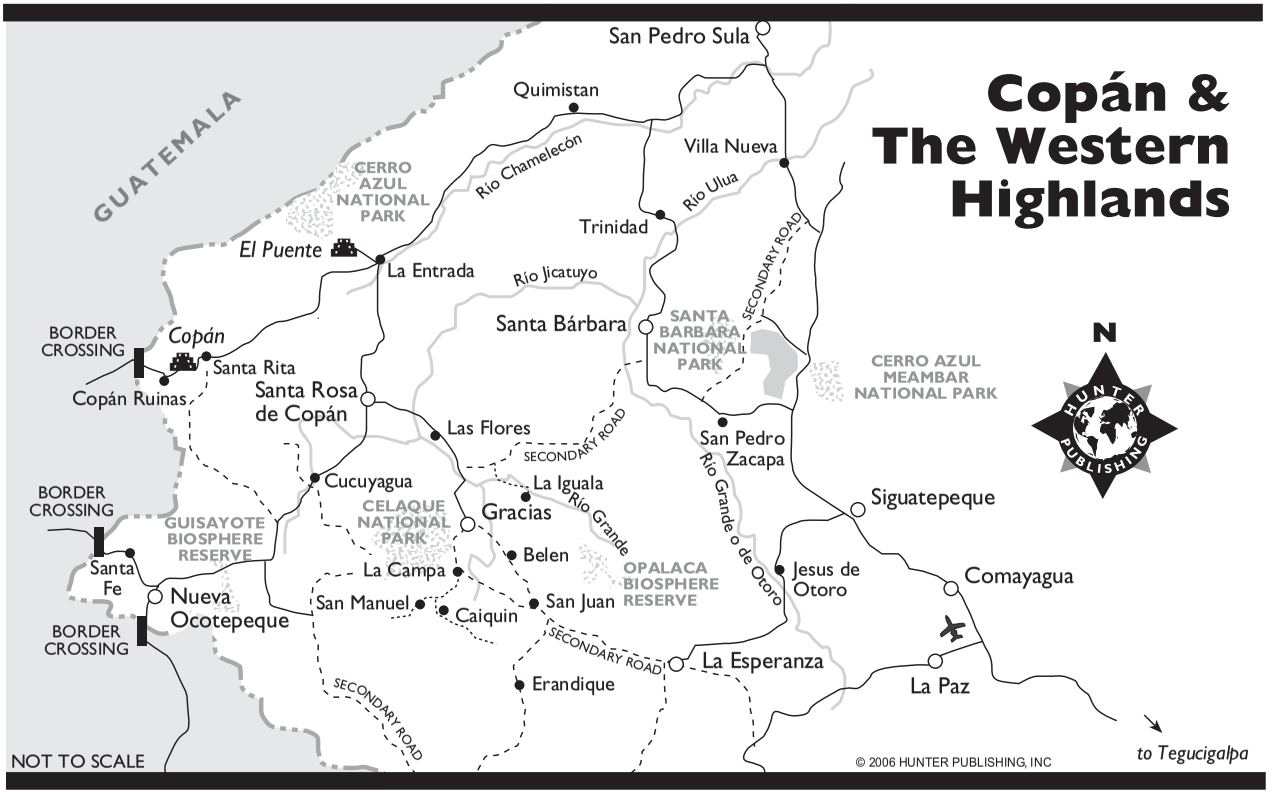
The Ruins of Copán are undoubtedly the premiere attraction of Western Honduras. The secrets of an ancient civilization continue to fascinate us while dedicated researchers unravel the mysteries buried for centuries and carved in stone. At the same time, the charm of the town of Copán Ruinas, which is just one mile from the main ruins site, will captivate even the most jaded traveler. The ruins are in Copán Valley, amidst pine-covered hills, on the edge of western Honduras. A visit to the Ruins of Copán is a must-do in Honduras for almost all visitors.

Few, however, venture into the surrounding rural countryside. A mountainous region of unpaved roads, steep inclines, and shrouded peaks provide an adventurous spirit with plenty to see and do. The western highlands of Honduras have a rich cultural history that is a mixture of local indigenous customs and the Colonial era. Thick forests and high mountains with cool temperatures contain dozens of charming villages of whitewashed homes with red-tile roofs and Colonial churches perched on hillsides or nestled in mountain valleys. Most regions are undeveloped and there are few services; but this factor adds to its appeal. Isolation from the modern world has allowed the local Lenca culture to preserve many of its customs. These are easily observable through their religious traditions, food preparation, and handicrafts. It's a timeless rural highland landscape of pine-covered hillsides, pastures, and small plots of corn, beans, and other crops sown by hand or with the aid of ox-drawn plows.


Copán & The Western Highlands
GUATEMALA
San Pedro Sula
Quimistan
Villa Nueva
Río Chamelecón
Río Ulua
CERRO AZUL NATIONAL PARK
Trinidad
El Puente
La Entrada
Río Jicatuyo
SECONDARY ROAD
BORDER CROSSING
Copán
Santa Rita
Copán Ruinas
Santa Bárbara
SANTA BARBARA NATIONAL PARK
CERRO AZUL MEAMBAR NATIONAL PARK
Santa Rosa de Copán
Las Flores
SECONDARY ROAD
San Pedro Zacapa
Río Grande o de Otoro
Cucuyagua
La Iguala
Río Grande
Siguatepeque
BORDER CROSSING
CELAQUE NATIONAL PARK
Gracias
GUISAYOTE BIOSPHERE RESERVE
Belen
Santa Fe
La Campa
OPALACA BIOSPHERE RESERVE
Jesus de Otoro
Comayagua
Nueva Ocotepeque
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to Tegucigalpa

Border crossings into El Salvador and Guatemala are in this region and it's good place for your Honduras adventure to begin.

■ The Land

Western Honduras is rugged mountain territory. The western Celaque Mountain range has Honduras' highest peaks, with the Pico Congolón at an elevation of 8,202 feet (2,500 m) and the Cerro de Las Minas at 9,350 feet (2,850 m). Unfertile soil and relative isolation due to the difficult terrain have contributed to the general lack of development in this region.

■ History

Evidence of habitation in western Honduras has been found dating back as far as 1400 BC. When the Spanish Conquistadores arrived, several indigenous groups inhabited the area. Some anthropologists believe that the modern-day Lenca are the descendents of tribes that lived in the departments of Lempira, Intibucá, La Paz, Valle, Comayagua, and Francisco Morazán at the time of the Spanish conquest in the 1500s. The ancient Maya civilization had already disappeared and their descendants, the Maya-Chortí, inhabited the Copán Valley and outlying areas.

The Spanish conquest of Honduras began in 1524 with expeditions led by different factions into the territory. Their quest for power, gold, and silver led to mass exploitation of local indigenous people through forced labor and slavery, which in turn led to continuous revolts as well as a sharp decrease in the local population from mistreatment and imported diseases.

The early years were not easy for the Conquistadores, who fought among themselves. They faced repeated local resistance along with the subsequent decline of indigenous slave labor. The situation worsened in Higueras, the western part of the Honduras-Higueras Province, when Spaniard Pedro de Alvarado, the conqueror of Guatemala, started gold mining in Gracias and the need for laborers increased. Alvarado was a

particularly ruthless conqueror and employed any means necessary to obtain the submission of native peoples. One famous quote of Don Pedro's is, "So they will not submit…Let them ttaste the steel of our swords and the points of our lances, we will give them no quarter and show no mercy…then you will see how they fear us!"

In 1537, Lempira, a renowned Lenca Cacique, organized further resistance against the Spanish conquerors when he managed to unite more than 200 tribes, many of which had previously been rivals, with the purpose of expelling the Spaniards. Lempira established a fortified base on a hill known as Peñol de Cerquín and he instructed his allies to begin the uprising when he gave the signal. His signal to revolt finally came when he ordered the killing of three unsuspecting Spaniards who were in the area. The governor of the province, Francisco de Montejo, ordered an attack on the fortress, but it was impenetrable. Lempira was able to hold off the Spanish and cause a general state of insurrection in Honduras until 1538 when he was murdered during a peace conference. So goes the official version. Another version of Lempira's death, written by Rodolfo Ruíz in the 1500s, was found in the archives of Seville, Spain. Ruiz, a lieutenant under Pedro de Alvarado, states that he was ordered by Governor Montejo to put down the uprising and that he, Ruíz, killed Lempira in a hand-to-hand battle.

Regardless of how he died, the fact remains that, after Lempira's death, indigenous resistance to the Spanish conquest waned and died out by 1839. Mineral deposits in western Honduras soon dried up and when the "Audiencia de Los Confines," or Central American government headquarters, were moved from Gracias to Antigua, Guatemala in 1549, the area was once again relegated to the backwaters of history.

■ Copán Ruinas

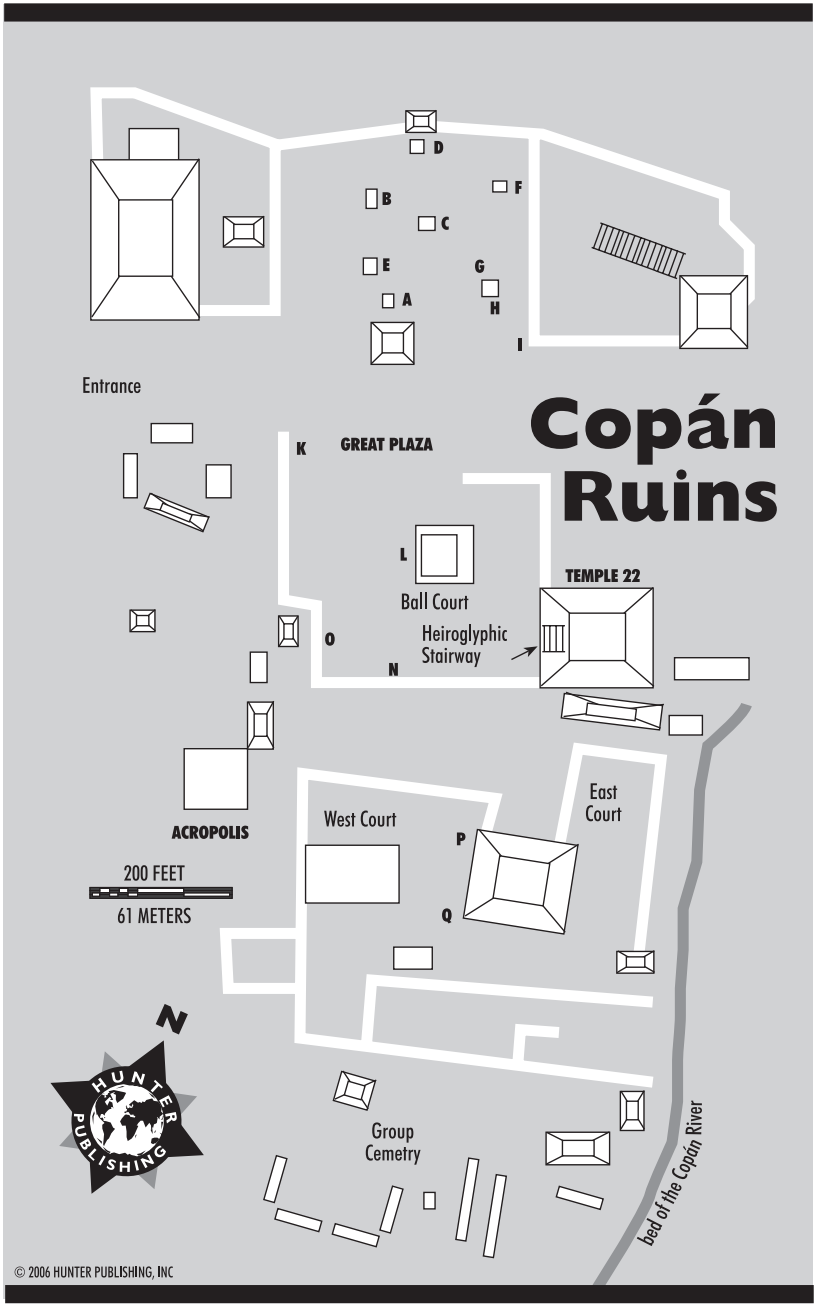
Nestled in western Honduras in the Copán Valley is the Copán Ruins Archaeological Park, declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1980, and Honduras' premiere traveler destination. In the park and throughout the entire valley, you will be able to observe superb examples of Maya architecture,

hieroglyphics, and the famed sculpted stelae, which were created by the talented artists of an ancient civilization that flourished in the area for many centuries. The Maya were advanced scholars and developed reading, writing, and mathematical systems. As dedicated astronomers, they were able to calculate the length of the year at 365 days and of the lunar month of 29.5 days. Their discoveries did not spread to other peoples, and the Hindus were the ones who finally developed the null concept for zero in mathematical calculations. But the Maya were one of four ancient civilizations, along with the Babylonians, Chinese, and Hindus, that independently developed a place-value number system with a zero. They used a place-value system to base 20 with a shell symbol for zero. Their number system was extensively used in the historic carvings and hieroglyphs found in Copán. These are known to be the most elaborate found in the Maya kingdom. Although smaller than some other important Mayan cities, the Ruins of Copan have more hieroglyphic texts than almost any other Mayan urban center. The Hieroglyphic Stairway alone contains nearly 2,000 glyphs. For reasons unknown and much debated, the Maya civilization died out around 900 AD.

The Hieroglyphic Stairway

Plan to spend at least two days visiting the Copán Ruins Archaeological Park, the Museum of Maya Sculpture, the Museum of Archaeology in town, *Las Sepulturas*, a nearby Maya residential area and *Los Sapos*, which is thought to be the place where Maya women went to give birth, and is a 30-minute drive from town.

Did You Know? The hieroglyphic stairway in Copán is the longest example of Mayan text known from the Mayan civilization, as well as the most studied.


Copán Ruins
Entrance
D
B
F
C
E
G
A
H
I
K
GREAT PLAZA
L
Ball Court
TEMPLE 22
Heiroglyphic Stairway
O
N
ACROPOLIS
West Court
East Court
P
Q
200 FEET
61 METERS
N
HUNTER PUBLISHING
Group Cemetry
bed of the Copán River
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The town of Copán Ruinas, which is a beautiful village of cobblestone streets, whitewashed adobe homes, and amicable residents, is also a good choice for a longer stay if you have a few extra days to spend anywhere in Honduras. about five minutes from the park, you will find hotels, restaurants, shops, museums, and other services that cater to the traveler; so get ready to kick back, relax, and be taken care of in a friendly atmosphere.

Fun activities abound in the area in and around Copán Ruinas and you can visit the Macaw Mountain Park, which is a definite must-do, visit the Maya Children's Museum, or decide to stay longer and learn Spanish at one of the Spanish Schools. A home stay with a local family can be arranged for a prolonged visit. While there, you can hike to a nearby waterfall or to a not-so-nearby cave, where only the brave venture deep within. Visit a working coffee plantation, or a Maya indigenous community to observe their way of life and watch local artisans at work. You might choose to go bird-watching, horseback riding, mountain biking, or tubing down the Copán River, and/or camp in a nearby mountain reserve. Finally, when you are worn out from doing so much, you can soak in the soothing thermal hot springs. Whatever you choose to do and for however long you stay, your trip to Copán Ruinas is sure to be a memorable.

History

The Copán Valley is thought to have been inhabited as far back as 1400 BC, mainly by farmers and hunter-gatherers who took advantage of fertile valley soil and abundant wildlife to survive. Construction of the city of Copán, known as Xukpi by its inhabitants, began around 159 AD; but it remained a relatively small and unimportant settlement until 426 when dynastic rule was established by Yak K'uk Mo' (Sun-Faced First Quetzal Macaw).

16 Kings

It's unclear where Yak K'uk Mo' came from; but many archaeologists believe he was from Teotihuacán (the largest Maya City of around 150,000) or from Quiriguá, a Maya City 40

miles north of Copán, in present-day Guatemala. Yak K'uk Mo' was succeeded by his son K'inich Popol Hol, who perpetuated the theocracy that went on for 16 generations.

"The classic period begins in Copán around 400 AD and is marked by a strong imposition of Maya traditions. These traditions came to Copán from the Maya lands to the north and west and most likely came with the first ruler of the dynasty: K'inich Yax K'uk Mo'.

Before this Maya influence, many of the settlements in the Copán Valley were on high ground, in defensible positions. Archaeologically, it appears that there was a great deal of political fragmentation during this time and skirmishes were frequent. A ruler representing Maya centers to the west came to this valley and changed the history of this region forever.

While archaeologists gather information from many sources, a key piece in our understanding of Copán's history is Altar Q. It was commissioned by the 16th ruler, Yax Pasah in the year 775 AD, and has been a highly important historical document for Maya scholars. On it are carved the 16 rulers of Copán, all seated on their hieroglyphic names and in their dynastic order. On the front of the altar, Yax Pasah receives the staff of rule from the founder of the dynasty, K'inich Yax K'uk Mo', and by doing so, he proclaims the legitimacy of his reign.

On the top of the altar, facing upward and readable only from the stairs of Temple 16, a hieroglyphic text narrates the arrival of the founder of Copán and the establishment of his dynasty in the year 426 AD. The altar's text ends by describing the dedication of the "K'inich Yax K'uk Mo' altar" by Yax Pasah in 775 AD.

The origins of this great leader from the West continues to be subject to debate. Dr. Robert Sharer, a respected archaeologist from the University of Pennsylvania, directed most of the recent excavations under the East Court of the Acropolis. He believes that the tomb he discovered in the earliest levels of excavation held the remains of K'inich Yax K'uk Mo'. The contents of the tomb, results of bone and teeth analyses, the sequence of con-

structions on this sacred, central axis and the clear iconographic emphasis given to the veneration of this ancestor give great weight to Sharer's view.

It is possible that K'inich Yax K'uk Mo' arrived in Copán as the representative of a complex society with advanced social and political organization, interested in extending their political and commercial interests eastward. In this attractive, mountainous region with freshwater springs and a fertile river valley, he encountered non-Maya, fragmented, warring factions.

At the eastern edge of the Maya territory, Copán was well situated to offer access to the major trade routes supplying rich resources from central Honduras and the Pacific coast of El Salvador. By controlling this region, the Maya states would have better control over important sources of jade, cacao, cotton, obsidian, exotic bird feathers, and other highly valued products.

K'inich Yax K'uk Mo' was able to make military and political alliances with the leaders of the fractured settlements in the Copán Valley, including his marriage to a high-ranking local woman. Her tomb is very close to his and is the most impressive royal tomb yet found at Copán. Perhaps reinforced by military backing of a state with Teotihuacán ties, K'inich Yax K'uk Mo' brought stability, peace and prosperity to the region. His arrival marked the beginning of a royal dynasty that would prosper for 400 years.

Intensive archaeological research shows that population growth was gradual in the early part of the dynasty. K'inich Yax K'uk Mo' unified the society he founded under the rule of one royal lineage; he introduced hieroglyphic writing and commissioned vibrantly painted monumental buildings charged with complex iconography.

The city progressively increased in size and diversity for the following four centuries, forming a state that played a starring role in Maya history and exerted influence over a large area. Studies of the residential settlements estimate a population of 27,500 people toward the end of the eighth century AD." – Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle, 2004

A large gap in written history exists between the reign of the first king and that of the 10th king. This is due to the Maya custom of building upon buildings and reusing stone for new constructions. It wasn't until the 10th king or "Moon Jaguar," who ruled from 553 to 578 when the exemplary buildings and monuments that distinguish Copán from other city-states began to arise. Moon Jaguar is credited with building the impressive and intricate Rosalila temple, which was later buried, but not destroyed, under Temple 16. A replica of the Rosalila can be seen in the Museum of Mayan Sculpture.

Buts'Chan, "Smoke Serpent," succeeded Moon Jaguar and reigned from 578 to 628, continuing to build up the city although only one stela is attributed to him. On February 8, 628, Smoke Imix K'awiil ascended to the throne, where he remained for 67 years. As a warrior king, during his reign Smoke Imix built up the military power of Copán and gained control over surrounding areas, perhaps even as far away as Quiriguá, where a carving depicting a warrior seated in lotus position (Copán-style) is accompanied by hieroglyphs spelling out his name.

Smoke Imix's style of warring with and conquering his neighbors was typical of Maya rulers of the times. It is believed that for this reason the Maya civilization, which spanned a large area, was never centralized. Rather, large city-states ruled over vast areas that they were able to control. Control was exercised not only through physical power, but also through religion and social structure. The Mayan social structure was highly stratified and deeply traditional. People remained within the social class they were born into for their entire lives. Lives that were ruled by cult veneration of the different gods from whom the kings were descended helped perpetuate Maya traditions. Stelae were erected to commemorate rituals such as blood sacrifice, vision quest, ancestor worship, royal accessions, and the completion of calendrical cycles.

Smoke Imix put up stelae around the valley in the mountains, probably to commemorate important events or rituals carried out in those places. Upon his death, Uaxaclajuun Ub'aah K'awiil (695-738) became the 13th ruler of Copán. His name means "Eighteen are the bodies of K'awil" (K'awil was an important Maya god, a sacred being that symbolizes royal bloodlines or generations); he was better known as Eighteen

Rabbit and is famous for the construction of the Great Plaza, the Ball Court, Temple 22 and for starting the hieroglyphic stairway. Eighteen Rabbit also supposedly introduced high-relief or full-round sculpture, which became a signature of Copán.

The long reigns of Smoke Serpent (578–628), Smoke Imix (628–695), and Eighteen Rabbit (695–738), provided Copán with stability, which allowed the city to flourish and reach new heights of artistic and scientific achievement. Unfortunately, Cauau Sky, the King of Quiriguá, captured and assassinated Eighteen Rabbit. Quiriguá, prior to the death of Eighteen Rabbit, was a small, unimportant state. However, After the murder, however, it rose to new importance and presumably ruled over Copán.

Ruler 14 or Smoke Monkey ruled for nine years during this time, but left no evidence of his presence. Only later did his predecessors record his reign. It was not until eight years into the reign of Ruler 15 or Smoke Shell (749-763) that Copán's tradition of construction and monument building was revived. Smoke Shell continued building the hieroglyphic stairway and even built the temple on top of it. Astronomers met in Copán to study eclipses.

The last king of Copán was Yax Pac (763-820), which means dawn. He built the Acropolis as seen today, as well as Altar Q, Temple 11, and Temple 16 at the very center of the acropolis around 776.

Collapse

"In its last decades, the city and the valley of Copán suffered unprecedented demographic growth accompanied by the intensification of agricultural systems and acceleration of environmental degradation. Archaeologists and paleo-ecologists have found dramatic evidence that the growing population began to occupy and farm marginal lands, thereby increasing deforestation and erosion.

The impact of this process was extreme on the human population. Physical anthropologists have shown that the skeletons from this time had a lower life expectancy and suffered from malnutrition and disease. Having de-

stroyed their valley, and unable to feed themselves, the city was eventually abandoned. The last carved monument is from 822 AD.

Over the next few centuries, the land healed slowly. Devoid of significant human populations, it recovered and had developed into a lush, forested valley by the time of the arrival of the early European explorers in the 16th century.

Today, Copán again flourishes, this time as the principal cultural tourism attraction for the nation of Honduras. After three decades of investment into research, conservation, and basic tourism infrastructure, Copán serves as a model in the Maya world for sustainable development of an archaeological site, and is a major source of pride for the Honduran people." – Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle, 2004

Discovery & Research of the Copán Ruins

After Copán was abandoned, it was overgrown by the rainforest and partially destroyed by earthquakes and the nearby river over the centuries. Although local inhabitants knew of its existence, the ruined city was virtually unknown to the outside world.

The first European recorded as seeing the ruins of Copán was Spanish explorer Diego García de Palacio. In a letter he wrote to King Philip II of Spain in 1576, he remarked that the city was built "with such skill that it seems it could never have been made by people as coarse as the inhabitants of this province."

In 1834, Juan Galindo, a member of the Government of Central America, led an expedition to the Copán Ruins and carried out some preliminary research on the site including the first excavation of a tomb in the Eastern Court. Galindo's was the first illustrated account of Copán and it included a map, plans of several buildings, and drawings of some of the monuments.

Galindo's publication caught the attention US explorer and travel writer John Lloyd Stephens. In 1839, Stephens, accompanied by English architect and drafter Frederick

Catherwood, spent several weeks in Copán clearing the site, drawing and mapping the buildings in detail. *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and the Yucatan*, a two-volume illustrated chronicle of their trip, was published in 1841. Their work sparked the immediate interest of scholars in Europe and the United States, and is credited with initiating today's era of modern Maya studies.

The Father of Maya Studies

Alfred Maudslay, an English diplomat and explorer, who made a number of expeditions to Maya sites in Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Belize between 1881 and 1894, carried out the first archaeological study of the ruins of Copán.

In 1885, Maudslay began mapping, excavation and reconstruction of the ruins. He also photographed them extensively and made plaster casts of the monuments, hieroglyphic text and images, producing invaluable scientific material for generations of Mesoamerican scholars. During his studies in Copán, Maudslay made several important discoveries, including the Hieroglyphic Stairway, the inner chamber of Temple 22, and Temple 20, which was later washed away by the Copán River.

The result of Maudslay's work, including drawings by Anne Hunter, plus photographs, site plans and descriptions, was published between 1889 and 1902 as a six-volume archaeology section in a compendium titled *Biologia Centrali-Americana*.

Maudslay's work inspired archaeological expeditions between 1891 and 1895 that were organized by Harvard University's Peabody Museum. These uncovered nine new stelae and fully excavated the Hieroglyphic Stairway. Sylvanus G. Morley, specialist in Mayan hieroglyphs who was a member of the Peabody expeditions, carried out further fieldwork in the region and in 1920, under the auspices of the Carnegie Institution, published *The Inscriptions of Copán*. Between 1935 and 1946, the Washington Carnegie Institution also carried out an investigation and restoration project of the Principal Group, which included diverting the Copán River to prevent further destruction of the ruin site.

In 1959-1960, archaeologists Heinrich Berlin and Tatiana Proskouriakoff made a major breakthrough in Maya studies when they realized that the hieroglyphic texts record the history of the cities and the dynasties.

The Honduran Institute for Archaeology and History (IHAH) began the Copán Project in 1977, a series of research and preservation projects, in cooperation with experts worldwide.

Getting There

Getting to Copán Ruinas entails driving or taking a bus. Or you can take the chartered flight from Roatán.

By Bus

Copán Ruinas is about a 2½-hour road trip from San Pedro Sula.

Hedman Alas provides luxury bus services, with a/c, bathroom, and videos, from their terminals in:

- San Pedro Sula, 8-9 Ave NO, 3 Calle, ☎ 553-1361.
- Copán Ruinas, San Lucas Hacienda Visitor's Center, two blocks north of The centRal plaza, ☎ 651-4037, 651-4036.
- Guatemala City, 2 Ave 8-73, Zona 10, ☎ 502-362-5072 to 78.
- Tegucigalpa, 11 Ave, 13-14 Calle, Comayagüela, ☎ 237-7143, 238-3040.
- La Ceiba, Supermercado Ceibeño #4, Road to Trujillo, ☎ 441-5357.

The bus from San Pedro Sula to Copán Ruinas is $8 one-way, leaving at 9:50 am, 10:40 am (Fri, Sun only) and 2:50 pm.

From Copán Ruinas to San Pedro Sula one-way is also $8 and leaves at 5:30 am, 10:30 am and 2:30 pm (Fri, Sat, Sun, Mon only).

Etumi runs a direct bus to San Pedro Sula at 6 am, 7, 2 and 3 pm for about $4.

Casasola Express offers express bus service to and from Copán Ruinas from their terminals in:

- San Pedro Sula, 6 y 7 Ave, 6 Calle, Barrio El Centro, ☎ 558-1659.
- Copán Ruinas, in front of Hotel La Posada.

From San Pedro Sula to Copán, buses leave at 8 am, 10:15, 1 and 2 pm.

From Copán to San Pedro Sula buses leave at 5:35 am, 7 and 2 pm.

By Car

Copán Ruinas is about 105 miles (169 km) from San Pedro Sula. You must take the highway south out of town for about five miles (eight km). The turn-off to the Western Highway (CA 4) is just after the tollbooths and the gas station on the right-hand side of the road.

Stay on this highway until you reach the large roadside town of La Entrada. The exit for Copán Ruinas is on the right. A 40-mile (64-km) paved road (CA 11) eventually leads straight into the village of Copán Ruinas.

By Plane

La Estanzuela Tours, ☎ 651-4515, laestanzuela_tours@yahoo.es, manages a private airstrip in the Copán region and offers charter flights, as well as the first commercial service to Copán Ruinas from the island of Roatán every Thursday. A round-trip ticket costs $180, one-way, $90; flights depart Roatán at 8 am, and return from Copán the same day at 3 pm.

Getting Around

Copán Ruinas is a small town and everything is within walking distance, including the Archaeological Park, the Macaw Mountain Reserve, and the Butterfly Farm. Other sites that are more distant require taking a tour, hiring a taxi, catching a pick-up traveling that way for a nominal fee (just hang out at the entrance to the indicated road), hitching, or hiking long distances. Tuk-tuks, motorized three-wheelers that seat four people, are available for travel within town and for about Lps. 5 will take you anywhere you want to go. Buses arrive near the center of town and you should use the Central Plaza as your reference point.

Practicalities

Banking

Banco de Occidente, corner of The centRal plaza, cashes traveler's checks. Open weekdays from 8 am to 4:30 pm, Saturday from 8 am to 11:30 am.

Banco Atlántida, Central Plaza, offers Visa cash advances. Open weekdays from 8 am to 3 pm, Saturday from 8 am to 11 am.

Banco Credomatic, next to the Church, has an American Express/MasterCard ATM. Open daily from 8 am to 9 pm.

Medical Services & Pharmacies

Dr. Luis Castro, ☎ 651-4504. An English-speaking doctor with a clinic next to the Banco de Occidente on the corner of the park. Open weekdays 8 am to noon and 2-4:30 pm.

Farmacia Angel, ☎ 651-3676, is a drugstore one block south of the park. Open daily from 8 am to 9 pm.

Government Services

Hondutel (phone company) is half a block south from the Central Plaza's southwest corner. Open daily 7 am to 9 pm.

The **police station**, ☎ 651-4060, 1½ blocks west of northwest corner of the Central Plaza. Open 24 hours.

The **post office** (**Honducor**), a half-block west of the southwest corner of the Central Plaza. Open weekdays 8 am to 4 pm and Saturday 8 am to noon.

Immigration is one block west and half a block south from the southwest corner of the Central Plaza. Open weekdays 8 am to 4 pm and Saturday 8 am to noon.

Internet

Maya Connections Internet Café & Business Center has three locations. One is in the "Casa de Todo," one block from the corner of Banco de Occidente in the Central Plaza; the others are in the Hotel Camino Maya and the Hotel Yaragua. Services and products offered include Internet, photocopies, assorted snacks, computer and office supplies, film and batteries, fax and phone.

1. Market
2. Catholic Church
3. Guacamaya Spanish School
4. Archaeological Museum
5. Casa K'inich Children's Museum
6. Café Welchez
7. Hotel Marina Copán
8. Hotel Los Jaguares
9. Hotel La Posada
10. Hotel Acropolis Maya
11. Hostel en La Manzana Verde
12. La Casa de Maíz Restaurant
13. Restaurante La Choza
14. Hotel Los Gemelos
15. La Casa de Todo
16. Hotel Clásico Copán
17. Finca El Cisne Info Center
18. Hotel Yaragua/Yaragua Tours
19. Hotel Popol Nah
20. Vamos a Ver Restaurant, Cinema
21. Hotel Camino Maya
22. Carnitas Nía Lola Restaurant & Book Exchange
23. Don Udo's Hotel & Restaurant
24. Twisted Tanya's Restaurant & Bar
25. Café Via Via
26. Tunkul Restaurant/Bar, Go Native Tours
27. Llama Del Bosque Restaurant
28. Hotel Plaza Copán
29. Casa de Café B&B
30. Iguana Azul Hostel
31. Hotel Posada Real
32. Maya Connections

Learning

Spanish Schools

Guacamaya School, ☎ 651-4360, www.guacamaya.com, info@guacamaya.com. Offers Spanish lessons at all levels to all ages through a Spanish immersion program that includes a seven-day and -night home-stay with private room and three meals per day; 20 hours of instruction with a flexible schedule; and daily outings around the village and surrounding areas. Price is $200 a week, including home-stay or $130 if you stay in a hotel. The school can also make hotel arrangements.

Ixbalanque Spanish Language School, ☎ 651-4432, www.ixbalanque.com, ixbalanquehn@yahoo.com, ixbalan@hondutel.hn, offers Spanish lessons at all levels to all ages. Their Spanish immersion program includes a seven-day and -night home-stay with private room and bath, laundry service; three meals a day; 20 hours of instruction; and one tour to a local attraction. Total cost is $220. It is recommended that you arrive on the weekend to begin classes on Monday.

Tour Operators

Copán Guide Association, Visitor's Center in the Copán Archaeological Park, ☎ 651-4018, 651-4349. The Guide Association offers a number of tours in Spanish, English, French, and Italian. These include horseback riding tours to the archaeological sites of Los Sapos, Las Sepulturas and Stelae 10 and 12; tours of both Archaeological Museums; the Principal Group and Tunnels; a hot springs tour by car; a caving adventure and a living culture tour of local indigenous villages; and a bird-watching tour (230 species of birds have been identified by the guides).

Yaragua Tours, half a block east of The centRal plaza, ☎ 651-4147, fax 651-4050, www.yaragua.com, info@yaragua.com, offers tourist information, free maps, cash advances on Visa or MasterCard and traveler's check exchange, as well as a variety of adventure and culture tours for reasonable prices. Open daily 7 am to 9 pm.

Go Native Tours, in the back of the El Tunkul Restaurant, one block west of The centRal plaza, ☎ 651-4410,

gnative4@hotmail.com. René Hernández, owner and guide, rents mountain bikes for about $2 a day and has a variety of tours that include a bilingual guide for a reasonable price.

Trifinio Tours, ☎ 651-4023, conducts tours in Spanish, English, French and Italian. Tours include the Ruins Sites, horseback riding, Chortí communities and Stela 10, bird-watching, and a scenic town tour in a moto-taxi.

Finca El Cisne, 14 miles north of Copán Ruinas, ☎ 651-4695, www.fincaelcisne.com, info@fincaelcisne.com, is a working coffee/cardamom plantation and cattle ranch. They have horseback riding, hiking, hot springs, and agricultural tours. Lodgings and camping facilities are also available. See *Where to Stay*, page 310.

Shopping

Sol Naciente Souvenir Association, north of the Central Plaza, is a group of eight souvenir shops in one place, offering a variety of products. Some of the handicrafts for sale include woven baskets, purses, jewelry, pewter lamps and candleholders, ceramics, woodcarvings, stone carvings, and Lenca potteryc. They also sell various types of coffee.

La Casa de Todo, "The House of Everything," is one block from the corner of Banco de Occident in the Central Plaza. This is a souvenir shop and restaurant. It also offers laundry services, a book exchange, and general traveler's information. The restaurant or café offers a variety of coffee, fresh bread, cheese, sandwiches, vegetarian pasta, yogurt and smoothies. This is a nice place to chill out with a good book. Open from 7 am to 9 pm.

Asociación Copán Souvenir Shop, Visitor's Center, Copán Archaeological Park. This is part of the non-profit organization supporting park projects. Products offered include books on Mayan archaeology, the *Guide Book to the Ruins of Copán*, t-shirts and other items.

Mahchi Art Gallery, one block south of The centRal plaza, guillermomachi@globalnet.hn, www.hondurasart.com, offers distinctive handmade arts and crafts and the original works of Guillermo Mahchi.

Mini Market Gabriela's is one block of the park and offers basic food supplies and liquor.

Liquors & Cigars is in front of Llama del Bosque Restaurant. This small store offers a large selection of Honduran cigars and international liquors.

Kodak Express is two blocks west of the southwest corner of the Central Plaza. Open Monday to Saturday 8 am to 4 pm.

Sightseeing

Ricardo Agurcia Fasquelle, a noted Honduran archaeologist whose untiring dedication to uncovering the mysteries of Copán has proven invaluable to the advancement of Maya studies provided the following description. Agurcia is the author of several books on the subject of the Maya. He also founded the Copán Association in 1980 with the objective of researching and conserving Honduras' patrimony and has been directing it ever since. Agurcia's most notable achievement to date is the discovery of the Rosalila Temple, which he came upon while excavating Temple 16.

> *"The archaeological site of Copán is comprised of three major elements: the Principal Group, the southwestern residential zone El Bosque (the Forest), and the northwest residential zone Las Sepulturas (the Sepulchers). The Principal Group was the political, civic, and religious center of ancient life. El Bosque and Las Sepulturas were two elegant neighborhoods connected by ancient causeways to the Principal Group.*
>
> *The majestic* ***Principal Group*** *– today enveloped in a mantel of giant trees – is composed of the Great Plaza and the Acropolis. Both of these may be subdivided into smaller architectural elements: rectangular patios surrounded by pyramidal platforms and buildings.*
>
> *Both the Great Plaza and the Acropolis reflect enormous amounts of labor: the former because of its more than 7½ acres of artificially leveled terrain (originally paved with white plaster) and the latter due to its mass elevated more than 100 feet (30 m) above ground level.*
>
> ***The Great Plaza****, as the name implies, consists of large, open spaces. The two main causeways meet in this*

plaza. The plaza must have been host to impressive public events, as it could have held perhaps 20,000 people. At its northern end, the plaza is framed on three sides by staircases that served as seats for large crowds. In the center of this open-air theater, there are seven stelae and 11 altars forming one of the most beautiful sculpture gardens of the ancient world.

Research by scholars from the National University of Honduras has shown that the stelae and altars served as giant sundials and position markers, while the lines of the plaza itself formed an arena for large-scale ceremonies associated with solar observation. The principal solar events celebrated here registered the cyclical movement of the sun: the solstices, equinoxes, and the passages of the sun over the zenith.

***The Ball Court:** At the southern end of the great plaza there is another type of theater; here the performance was sport. Intimate seats on the north side perhaps reflected cost or rank of spectator; on the south side, an enormous terrace rises up to the Acropolis, accommodating hundreds of avid fans. The ancient ballgame was played with ritual importance, sometimes making heroes of both kings and captives.*

*In contrast to the Great Plaza, the **Acropolis** is a private area with restricted access and reduced open spaces. The acropolis was the precinct of political and religious power, the royal residence, and offices for the ruler and court.*

Architecturally, the Acropolis is composed of two rectangular courtyards: the East (or Jaguar) Court and the West Court. Between the two, at the center of the acropolis, is Temple 16, where Rosalila lies buried."

Copán Archaeological Park

The Copán Ruins Archaeological Park is just a half a mile east (.8 km) from the town of Copán Ruinas. You can either walk there on an elevated boardwalk, which runs along the side of the road east out of town to La Entrada, or take a taxi. The main park area is comprised of the principal group, the visitor's center, and the magnificent Museum of Maya Sculpture.

The **Visitor's Center** is at the main entrance and includes small exhibits on the history of Copán, the ticket booth and the official guide center. The **Museum of Maya Sculpture** is near the visitor's center. Entrance fees are as follows: $10 per person for the Ruins and Las Sepulturas (farther up the road); $5 for the Museum of Maya Sculpture; $12 for both tunnels; and $20 for a two-hour guided tour with a certified, multilingual guide. Other facilities include the gift shop and the cafeteria, which sells burgers, sandwiches, water, and assorted snacks.

TIPS FOR A RICHER EXPERIENCE

Buy *History Carved in Stone*, a booklet available at the gift shop in the park or at one of the souvenir stores in town. Hire an official guide at the visitor's center. Most of the guides speak English to varying degrees and talking to them before hiring one is the way to assure good communication. Antonio Ríos, an English-speaking guide, who was the first guide of Copán and the recipient of the 2004 Honduran Chamber of Tourism "Excellence in Tourism Prize" in the individual category, is highly recommended.

The Principal Group

The principal group, which includes the Great Plaza, the Ball Court, the Hieroglyphic Stairway, the Acropolis, and the Tunnels, is fenced off and provides a pedestrian trail that runs a loop through the ruins.

From the Visitor's Center, the pedestrian trail leads first to the **Great Plaza**. The plaza is a large and grassy rectangular area, which was a public arena and was surrounded by a massive stadium-like structure of steps on three sides and **Structure 4**, a small temple with a stairway on each side to the north. Various stelae (A, B, Calle, D, F, H and 4) and altars are scattered throughout the field, representing some of the finest, and most elaborate the Maya produced. The steps were built and the stelae carved during the reign of Eighteen Rabbit and most are portrait stela of rulers, but in different representations. **Stela A** is interesting because its text declares

Copán to be one of the four greatest states of the Maya world, along with Tikal, Palenque, and Calakmul.

The trail continues to **Ball Court**, where the playing field is between sloping walls upon which three sculptures of macaw heads are perched on each side. Above the walls are two temples from whice important personages probably watched the game.

Just beyond the Ball Court lies the **Hieroglyphic Stairway**, the longest and most studied hieroglyphic text in the Americas. The carvings and inscriptions found on the steps recount the city's history and the lineage of the rulers. At the foot of the gigantic structure is **Stela M**, which is a portrait of Smoke Shell, the 15th ruler of Copán, who completed the stairway.

Old Lady, Temple 22a

The path then leads around and up the structure that supports **Temple 11**, which was completed by Yax Pac, the last king of Copán. Temple 11 forms part the northern end of the **Acropolis**, which is divided into two areas, the West Court and East Court. These two are separated by **Temple 16**, under which lies the **Rosalila**. From Temple 11, you can appreciate the panoramic view of the Great Plaza to the north and of the **West Court** to the south. As you continue on the northern structure, you come to **Temple 22**, which rises above the **East Court** or **Plaza of the Jaguars** and contains some of the most intricate carvings found, which are rich in the symbolism of connections or relations to the supernatural world. Temple 22 is flanked to the west by the Jaguar staircase upon which the impressive carving, the "Mask of the Solar God," is located.

Following the stairway, **Temple 16**, the tallest structure found in the ruins, looms above the acropolis. Ruler 16, Yax Pac, built Temple 16 on top of the Rosalila Temple, which honored the Sun God. Surprisingly, care was taken during con-

struction not to destroy the earlier temple. "Moon Jaguar," the city's 10th leader, built the Rosalila. A short tunnel, which is open to the public, allows access for viewing the original façade, including a two-headed serpent. The **Jaguar Tunnel** also leads under the East Court past other facades and crypts, including the **Galindo Tomb**.

At the southern end of the East Court is **Structure 18**, which is the burial tomb of Yax Pac. From Structure 18 there is a view of the Copán River and south of the structure is a group of ruins that were the homes of the ruling elite.

Altar Q

In the West Court, at the base of the stairway of Temple 16, Yax Pac's most celebrated monument, **Altar "Q"** (now a replica) is found.

Las Sepulturas Residential Zone

Las Sepulturas are a little more than a mile (1.7 km) out of town past the main park area. Buy your tickets at the Visitor's Center and arrange for a guide there, as none are available at the site. It is believed that the elite lived in this area and excavation of the site included the discovery of one compound comprising 11 courtyards. Archaeologists have concluded from the hieroglyphics and sculptures that a patriarch of importance headed this compound. During excavation nearly 250 tombs were discovered, which also corroborates this theory, as the Maya nobles buried their dead near their homes. Another interesting discovery showed evidence of habitation in the area from around 1000 BC.

Los Sapos Archaeological Site, Hacienda San Lucas

Los Sapos is about six miles (9½ km) south of town in the hills within the property of the Hacienda San Lucas. You can either walk there, take a tour, or arrange for transportation at

the San Lucas Welcome Center, two blocks north of The centRal plaza, at the Hedman Alas Bus Terminal, ☎ 651-4495, open daily 9 am to 5 pm. They offer round-trips on horses ($10), and a shuttle for unlimited time ($16). There is a $2 entrance fee, which is included in the package trips.

"Los Sapos" means "the frogs," originating from the frog-shaped carvings in the boulders, thought to be fertility symbols for the Maya. Another, very faded carving of a woman having a child has led to the belief that Maya women went there to give birth. Although this site is not particularly spectacular (the carvings have faded over time), the trip out is always fun.

Stela 10 & Stela 12

The first stela erected by the 12th ruler of Copán in 652, Water Lily Jaguar, was Stela 10, which is 10 feet tall and is in the hills three miles (4½ km) west of and 945 feet (288 m) above the Principal Group. Stela 12, which is 10.7 feet (3.35 m) tall, lies 1½ miles (2½ km) to the east and 617 feet (188 m) above the principal ruins. The distance between these two stelae is about a mile (1.6 km) along a straight line. From Stela 12, the sun can be seen setting directly behind Stela 10, on April 12 and September 7.

El Puente Archaeological Park, another important Maya ruin site, is in La Entrada.

Museums

Copán Sculpture Museum, Main Park, is one of the most impressive projects (1993-1996) completed by the Copán Association. The Association's early years were spent rescuing sculpture from Copán, raising the necessary funds to build this enormous, yet subtle edifice, and finally managing the design and construction as it took form. The majority of the structure is underground and fringed with trees as a means of preserving the site's visual landscape. The museum has tremendous floor space and two stories of remarkable Copán sculpture. An open central skylight allows for ventilation. Visitors enter stylized jaws of the mythical serpent used by the Maya rulers to communicate with their dead ancestors. Following the 150-foot (50-meter) tunnel that represents the body of the serpent, they are symbolically transported into

Stela A

the past. The visitor is then delivered into an enormous courtyard dominated by the vibrant, life-size and full-color replica of Rosalila. Around the Rosalila replica, exhibit designer Barbara Fash mounted 59 exhibits with more than 3,000 pieces of sculpture, the majority of which are installed on the facades of six fully reconstructed buildings. This dramatic museum is also home to three of the most precious original stelae of Copán (Stela A, Stela P and Stela 2) as well as the original, renowned Altar Q. Open every day of the year 8 am to 4 pm. Admission to the museum is $5.

Maya Archaeology Museum, Central Plaza. This small museum has a rich selection of original Copán artifacts, including Stela 7, a carved bench from a scribe's home in Las Sepulturas, and the contents of a royal tomb (10J-45), complete with jade objects and ceramics, discovered in 1999 during road-building work. There is also the contents of shaman's burial chamber. Open daily except Sundays 8 am to 12 pm and 1 pm-4 pm. Entrance fee is $2 per person.

Casa K'inich or "House of the Sun" Children's Learning Center, Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4105, is a children's museum devoted to introducing children to the ancient Maya. Interactive exhibits are in three languages: English, Spanish, and the local Chortí Maya dialect. Children learn through play and can dress Copán's nobles with magnetized clothes, try on ballgame equipment and watch a re-enactment of the ballgame, practice Maya math and writing and learn how to count in Ch'orti', a Mayan language. The museum is open 8 am to noon and 1 to 5 pm, Monday to Saturday. Admission is free.

Birds & Butterflies

Macaw Mountain Bird Park & Nature Reserve, ☎ 651-4245, www.macawmountain.com, Copán Ruinas. The Macaw Mountain, one of Copán Ruinas' newest attractions, is just a little over a mile (1.7 km) from town on the road to the hot springs and is a definite must-see. The resident bird population, which numbers over 100 species, includes Honduras' indigenous parrots, four types of brilliant toucans, scarlet macaws (the national bird of Honduras), and Buffon's macaws (nearly extinct). As the property was once a coffee plantation, coffee trees, tropical flora and old growth forest also provide shelter to wild birds such as parakeets, toucans, orioles, and turquoise-browed and blue-crowned mot mots.

The park is situated on 10 acres of diverse terrain and features well-marked, wheelchair-accessible paths and boardwalks, a stream with a natural swimming hole, aviaries, and a large encounter area for interacting with the birds, as well as viewing spots that are strategically located at various heights to see the birds in their natural habitats. There is also an educational exhibit highlighting the relationship between the Maya civilization and birds. Examples of their admiration for birds are often found in Maya painting and sculpture – even in their names, as in the case of the first King of Copán and its dynastic founder, Yax Kuk Mo (Quetzal Macaw Lord).

The park boasts two eateries that can provide you with either a quick pick-me-up coffee and snack or a hearty meal after your bird-watching and bathing. The **Coffee Casita**, which is on a large outdoor deck overlooking the stream, offers cappuccinos and espressos as well as variety of pastries. The **Macaw Mountain Restaurant** serves burgers, hot dogs, a plate of the day, as well as an international menu, including fresh seafood imported from the Bay Islands.

The Casita is the coffee-roasting house for the coffee cultivated on the Macaw Mountain's sister project, **Finca Miramondo**. During the harvest, you can actually watch the coffee roasting and grinding. Tours of the coffee farm are also available and are highly recommended.

There is gift shop where you can buy coffee, local handicrafts as well as the usual assortment of t-shirts and caps. The park

and its facilities are open every day of the year from 9 am to 5 pm. Admission to the park is $10 for adults and $5 for children, which includes a guided tour with a friendly bilingual guide. Tickets are good for three visits on consecutive days.

Enchanted Wings Butterfly House and Nature Exhibit, ☎ 651-4133, is a quarter-mile or about a 10-minute walk on the road to Guatemala. Delight in the brilliant colors of over 40 species of butterflies, and more than 200 species of orchids. The five-terrace greenhouse covers 3,400 square feet (316 sq m) and has flagstone walkways leading from one level to the next. The eggs hatch from 8 to 11 am and, when their wings dry, the butterflies flitter among the visitors, feeding on hundreds of flowering plants, each with an identification tag. Other facilities include a gift shop, a small eatery, and a patio-deck where you can hang out as long as you want. There is even a place to tie your horse! Admission is $5 for adults and $3 for children 12 and under. Open daily from 8 am to 5 pm.

Sights Around Copán Ruinas

Indigenous communities, coffee farms, waterfalls, caving and bird-watching are all available from local tour operators listed. Almost all the listed activities into natural areas include bird-watching.

Hacienda San Lucas, ☎ 651-4495, www.haciendasanlucas.com, info@haciendasanlucas.com, offers horseback riding tours of indigenous communities, coffee farms, as well as to the farm itself, which includes bird-watching. They also visit Los Sapos archaeological site, explore nature trails and a small waterfall, and offer lodging in the coziest of B & Bs. This restored hacienda is in the hills above the town and has wonderful views of the valley and the ruins. Meals are also available. Make arrangements at the San Lucas Welcome Center, two blocks north of The centRal plaza, at the Hedman Alas Bus Terminal, ☎ 651-4495, open daily 9 am to 5 pm.

Finca Miramundo, www.cafemiramundo.com, is the sister project of the Macaw Mountain Bird Park and is a highland coffee farm dedicated to producing high quality coffee in an environmentally friendly process. The farm is interspersed with forest areas to provide safe harbor for migratory and resident birds. It has been proven that shade coffee plantations

provide habitats to numerous bird species in a world of ever-shrinking forests. Inquire at the bird park.

Finca Santa Isabel offers a fascinating and educational introduction to the entire process of coffee cultivation. You will get to taste the coffee and can even buy a pound or two to take home. For more information, contact them through the Hotel Marina Copán in the Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4071.

El Rubí is a stunning double waterfall near Santa Rita de Copán, which is a small village about 5½ miles (10 km) from Copán Ruins. The falls drop into a swimming hole between huge boulders covered in lichen. To get there take a tour or catch a ride with one of the pick-ups that leave regularly for the town of Santa Rita. At the river bridge, just before entering the town, a shaded path leads up to the waterfalls about 1½ miles (two km).

The best way to visit the waterfalls is with a guided tour as there have been numerous assaults to visitors on the way.

Around 12 miles (20 km) north of Copán are the **Hot Springs** (*Aguas Calientes*). Enjoy the drive through the scenic mountains where many small coffee plantations are to the springs. At the springs, you can either swim in the man-made pools or cross the river to hike up to the source where cool river water and near-boiling-hot spring waters combine in the river. Move around here until you find a water temperature you prefer. Amenities include showers, picnic facilities, and a snack bar. Open daily 8 am to 8 pm. Entrance fee is Lps. 20 (about $1). The best way to visit the springs is to arrange a tour combined with a visit to nearby coffee farms.

El Boquerón Cave is a river cave about an hour's drive from Copán. You park, then walk and climb to the cave entrance. Arranging for a tour is the best option, as the hike to get there is long and strenuous. During the dry season, the Río Blanco (White River) can be waded and followed deep into the cavern, which has both stalagmites and stalactites. A popular local legend says the Maya had a secret underground passage through this cave to Guatemala and the north coast. Bathing

suits, waterproof flashlights, and sturdy shoes are recommended for this trip.

Peña Quemada, Río Amarillo Valley, 12 miles (20 km) from Copán Ruinas, is a large tract of privately owned and well-preserved forest. Nature trails lead through humid tropical rainforest with huge mahogany trees towering 150 feet (46 m) and an abundance of wildlife, especially birds and butterflies – plus six troupes of howler monkeys. Morning bird walks start at 6 am, returning around 9 or 10. Wearing pants and good pair of hiking shoes is recommended.

Heron Sanctuary (November to May), Hotel Hacienda El Jaral lagoon. Thousands of white cattle egrets roost in the trees along the water's edge. **Hacienda El Jaral Tourist Complex**, Santa Rita de Copán, ☎ 552-4891, 552-4457, www.haciendaeljaral.com, hotel@haciendaeljaral.com. The Hacienda El Jaral is eight miles (13 km) from Copán Ruinas on the road to La Entrada and provides diversion for the entire family. The hotel has comfortable accommodations in a mountain environment where there is plenty to do. In the main complex, you will find the hotel, restaurant, a small shopping mall with food court and playground, an air-conditioned cinema showing movies only in English, river paddleboat, and bicycle rentals, as well as guided bird-watching, horseback riding, tubing, and coffee plantation tours. The newest Jaral attractions are the water park, which has two slides (one is 30 feet/10 m) and the cow museum that has antiques and glass displays with miniature cow replicas. Admission to the museum is free and, as someone said, "worth every lempira."

Where to Stay

Expensive

$$$-$$$$ **Marina Copán**, Central Plaza, www.hotelmarinacopan.com, info@hotelmarinacopan.com, ☎ 651-4071. This is the favorite lodging of many Hondurans and the comfortable accommodations include 11 single rooms, 34 double rooms, three triple rooms, and two luxurious suites with private bath, hot water, a/c, fan, and TV.

$$-$$$ **Hotel Camino Maya**, Central Plaza ☎ 651-4518, 651-4646, fax 651-4517, hcmaya@hondutel.hn. This two-story hotel with Colonial architecture and nice paintings offers 23 large rooms with a/c and ceiling fan, private bath, hot water, telephone and cable TV. Amenities include wheelchair accessibility, business room with high speed Internet access, adult and child swimming pools, laundry service, barbecue area, disco, giant TV, playground, parking, restaurant, bar, café and room service. The hotel will also help you arrange tours in the area and transportation.

$$$ **Plaza Copán**, Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4092, 651-4031, placopan@emv.hn. A small and charming hotel right on the Central Plaza. Accommodations include 20 rooms, with two double beds, a/c and ceiling fan, cable TV, private bath, hot water, telephone and some with small balcony overlooking the Central Plaza. Other amenities include swimming pool, bar and restaurant, parking, and laundry service. The hotel restaurant has a pleasant atmosphere with large bay windows and offers a wide menu ranging from fast food, soups, appetizers, and pastas to beef and chicken entrées, as well as a Sunday breakfast buffet.

Moderate

$-$$ **Don Udo's** is one block south and then one block west from Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4533. This two-story hotel with Colonial-style architecture offers 16 rooms, each with its own décor, one or more beds, private bath, hot water, a/c and cable TV, overlooking the interior courtyard and garden. Amenities include a roof-top sun deck with great views of surrounding areas; a sauna and Jacuzzi; and a charming, outdoor deck restaurant with views, which offers an à la carte menu and is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as for snacks during the day. Rates range from $15 to $40 per person including breakfast. Children under 12 years of age stay free.

$$ **Los Jaguares**, adjacent to The centRal plaza, ☎ 651-4075, fax 651-4075, jaguares@copanhonduras.org. This small and cozy hotel offers rooms opening onto a corridor surrounding an interior patio with tables and chairs. Accommodations include 10 comfortable rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c fan, and TV. Private parking is also provided.

$$ **Hotel Yaragua**, half a block east Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4147, fax 651-4050, www.yaragua.com, info@yaragua.com. This small and centrally located budget hotel offers 24 rooms with double beds, fan, private bath, hot water, and cable TV. Amenities include bar, restaurant and tour operator. Breakfast included in rates.

$$ **Hotel Acropolis Maya**, one block north of The centRal plaza, ☎ 651-4634, fax 651-4118, acropolis@copan-honduras.org. Accommodations include 10 large rooms on a verdant inner courtyard with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV.

$-$$ **Hotel Popol Nah**, half a block south of the Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4095, www.hotelpopolnah.com, info@hotelpopulnah.com. This new hotel offers deluxe rooms with a/c, private bath, hot water, and ceiling fan for $45 and moderate rooms with private bath, hot water, and ceiling fan for $35.

$-$$ **Casa de Café Bed & Breakfast**, ☎ 651-4620, casadecafe@mayanet.hn, is on the northern edge of town and is a long-time travelers' favorite. Accommodations include 10 comfortable and nicely furnished rooms with private bath, hot water, ceiling fan, writing desk, and picture window with a panoramic view of the valley and mountains in the distance. Common areas include the main house with cable TV, videos, books, magazines, and the lovely patio with hammocks. Free fresh-ground and -brewed coffee is available all day long. Rates including breakfast are $45 for a double and $35 for a single.

Budget

Iguana Azul, ☎ 651-4620, casadecafe@mayanet.hn. From the park, walk one block south, turn right and walk for another five or six blocks. The "Blue Iguana" offers the best budget option with dormitory quarters and private rooms with comfortable beds, shared bath, hot water, laundry facilities, a nice living room with books and magazines, and a small outdoor patio with tables and chairs. Rates are $5 per bed/night and $11/night for private rooms.

Hostel En La Manzana Verde, next Hedman Alas Bus Station, ☎ 651-4652, en_la_manzana_verde@yahoo.com. This funky hostel offers clean dorm rooms with bunk beds and dou-

ble beds for $4 a night per person. Amenities include fully equipped kitchen for guest use from 7 am to 10 pm. Chill-out and laundry area with chairs and TV. Tours are also offered with bilingual guides at very reasonable rates.

Café Vía Vía Hotel, two blocks west of the park, ☎ 651-4657, offers basic rooms with private bath, hot water and fan. The Café is better known for their restaurant and bar (see page 312).

Hotel Calle Real, 2½ blocks north of the Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4230, hotelcallereal@yahoo.com. This well-tended, picturesque two-story hotel has a charm of its own with a beautiful garden, hammocks and colorful halls. Accommodations are basic and clean: single, double, and triple rooms with private bath, hot water, fan and cable TV. Parking and laundry services are also available.

Hotel Clásico Copán, one block behind the Catholic Church, ☎ 651-4040, hotelclassicocopan@yahoo.com. This hotel is in a modern two-story building with interior patio. Accommodations include 20 comfortable and airy rooms, with private bath, hot water, fan, cable TV and free coffee. Laundry service is also available. Rates are $8 single, $15 double and $20 triple.

Hotel Los Gemelos, next door to a souvenir/Internet shop, ☎ 651-4070/70/71/77. This backpacker favorite offers basic rooms with fans and shared bathroom around an interior garden with table and books.

Where to Stay Out of Town

$$-$$$ **Hacienda San Lucas**, ☎ 651-4495, www.haciendasanlucas.com, info@haciendasanlucas.com. This B&B offers two rooms in their solar-powered adobe ranch house, which is out of town on a small organic coffee farm. Amenities include nature trails and horseback riding as well as a restaurant and bar. Rates range from $75 for single occupancy to $110 for four people, including all taxes, a full hacienda breakfast, and entrance fee to nature trails. The full-service restaurant, which is open seven days a week, offers well prepared and delicious, traditional Honduran food. These out-of-town accommodations are still close enough to be near everything and are highly recommended for a pleasant stay.

$$$$ **Hotel Posada Real de Copán** (Best Western), ☎ 651-4480/81/82, info@posadarealcopan.com, is on the hill above Copán, offering sweeping views of the surrounding countryside. Deluxe accommodations include 80 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, cable TV, and a telephone with direct access to international calls. Accommodations for children 12 and under are free. The hotel has two bars: the Lobby Bar, located near the main entrance with a view of the pool and interior garden, and El Arqueólogo Bar, which features live music. Both are open from 10 am to 10 pm. The Hotel Restaurant offers local and international cuisine and is open from 6 am to 10 pm. Other amenities include a swimming pool, safety deposit box, gift shop, laundry, entertainment room, ample parking space, and room service from 6 am to 10 pm.

Where to Stay Far Out of Town

Finca El Cisne, 15 miles north of Copán Ruinas, ☎ 651-4695, www.fincaelcisne.com, info@fincaelcisne.com. A 45-minute drive into the mountains north of Copán Ruinas, this working farm can be visited for the day or you can plan on an extended stay at Casa Castejón. The refurbished farmhouse offers a peaceful retreat, which is just minutes from the hot springs and is surrounded by gardens and bordered by streams. Accommodations include five comfortable rooms that can sleep up to 15 people. Camping facilities are also available. Activities include horseback riding, hiking, hot springs and agricultural tours.

$$-$$$ **Hacienda El Jaral Hotel**, Santa Rita de Copán, ☎ 552-4891, 552-4457, www.haciendaeljaral.com, hotel@haciendaeljaral.com. This offers 22 rooms with a/c, ceiling fan, cable TV, phone, small refrigerator, private bath, with hot water, and private terrace complete with rocking chairs and a table for dining. Restaurant Hacienda El Jaral, next to the swimming pool, specializes in quality meat platters, seafood and pastas. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Full-service bar. Open 7 am to 9 pm. Amenities include room service, laundry, swimming pool, and video bar with pool tables. Souvenir and gift shops offer Honduran souvenirs, leather goods as well as a variety of snacks, drinks and non-prescription medicine. Open from 8 am to 12 pm and

1-6 pm. Additional amenities are numerous (see listing for Hacienda El Jaral Tourist Complex, page 306).

Where to Eat

$$$ **Twisted Tanya's Restaurant and Bar**, one block west and one block south of The centRal plaza, offers an excellent selection of vegetarian, tender fish and beef platters, with your pick of pastas, soups, sauces, all served with fresh, homemade bread. Sit back and get comfortable on the upstairs outdoor patio with the only view of the mountains of both Honduras and Guatemala at the same time. Satisfy your sweet tooth with a delicious homemade dessert such as cheesecake, walnut-carrot cake, or brownies accompanied by Café Miramundo, homegrown and roasted here. The restaurant also has a good selection of wines from Chile, Argentina and Spain, as well as fine cigars. Open from 11 am until everyone leaves. Two-for-one twisted cocktails, Happy Hour from 4 to 6 pm.

$$-$$$ **Glifos**, Hotel Marina Copán, Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4071. Hotel restaurant in front of pool area. Fine dining and house specialties such as tropical chicken salad, spaghetti béchamel, beef pepito, pollo al Loroco (chicken), and international platters such as meunier fish filet, and sweet and sour pork chops, tarragon fish, steak in mushroom wine sauce, and curry chicken, as well as a variety of desserts. Open daily from 6:30 am to 9:30 pm.

$-$$ **Tunkul Restaurant and Bar**, 1½ blocks west of the Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4410. This lively and popular restaurant and bar with its friendly atmosphere is a favorite hangout. Good music, draft beer, two happy hours, great food, and the friendly service combine to make this the happening place in Copán Ruinas. Try the famous Tunkul burrito, which is a hand-made flour tortilla that is over a foot long and stuffed with beans, beef, chicken, or vegetables, with sour cream on the side. A varied menu includes burgers, sandwiches, vegetarian platters, salads, and pastas; and open grills offer beef and chicken kebabs. Indoor/outdoor seating. Food served until 10 pm. Full bar. Open daily from noon to about midnight. Happy hour is from 7-8 pm and 10-11 pm daily. The owners, who are both English-speaking Hondurans with

many years of experience in the travel industry, also run Go Native Tours.

$-$$ **Carnitas Nía Lola Restaurant & Book Exchange**, two blocks south of the Museum of Anthropology. This two-story open-air wooden structure is next to the river and has a great view from the second floor. It is a popular eatery with both locals and travelers because of their modest prices and large portions. Typical dishes, many of which are prepared on the wood-burning stove in full view, include barbecued meat, chicken and pork platters, guacamole, and baleadas, among others. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner from 7 am to 10 pm. Happy hour from 6:30-8:30 pm.

$$$ **Los Gauchos**, one block south of the Central Plaza. A Uruguayan-style restaurant offering grilled meats, paella, and seafood dishes, as well as an ample wine list. Your best choice if you are hankering for a great steak. Full-service bar. Open 10 am to 10 pm.

$-$$ **Llama Del Bosque**, ☎ 651-4431. A favorite with travelers for the last 25 years, this airy and well-lit restaurant has become an institution in Copán Ruinas, serving generous portions of typical beef, chicken and pork platters. Open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner from 6:30-10 pm.

$ **Café Cinema Vamos a Ver**, half a block south of the park. This European-style café-bar shows movies nightly at 7 am. Owned by a Dutch couple, the restaurant/café, with courtyard seating and hammocks, has a full menu that includes vegetarian platters, especially hearty breakfasts, as well as fresh bread and fresh fruit. Open daily from 7 am to 10 pm.

$ **Café Vía Vía**, two blocks west of the plaza. A Belgian franchise with street-side terrace specializing in vegetarian cuisine. Hearty breakfast platters of pancakes, waffles, and omelets are served; as well as a large selection for lunch and dinner, including a variety of salads, sandwiches, gigantic burritos, veggie burgers, chili sin carne, fried rice, falafel, pita bread, and humus. Open daily from 7 am to 10 pm.

$ **Cafeteria Rosalila**, Visitor's Center, Archaeological Park. Offers buffet-style food for breakfast and lunch, as well as sandwiches and burgers. Water, juices, sodas and beer, plus assorted snacks are on sale. Open daily from 7:30 am to 4 pm.

This is a good choice for lunch when you visit the main park and Sculpture Museum.

$ **La Casa de Maíz**, one block east of the Central Plaza and Banco Occidente, ☎ 651-4080, fax 651-4045, casademaiz@yahoo.com. This restaurant's menu reflects the Maya ancestry of Copán Ruins, whose basic sustenance consisted of tortillas, beans, squash, and peppers. Open porch seating, red tile floors, walls painted in warm yellow and red earth tones, and decorated with local handicrafts, enhance the traditional eating experience. Traditional dishes offered include corn tamales, *montucas* (sweet corn tamale with meat), *ticucos* (corn tamale with beans), *atol de maíz dulce* (sweet corn drink), *atol chuco* (sour corn drink) and *chilate* (corn drink). Open daily for breakfast, lunch, and dinner from 7 am to 9 pm.

$ **Restaurante La Choza** is at the entrance to town, on the corner opposite the football field. Serves typical cuisine for breakfast, lunc and dinner, with, they say, the coldest beer in town. Full-service bar and occasional live music on weekends. Open daily from 7 am to 10 pm.

$ **Licuados Express** is one block south of the Central Plaza. They have licuados, fruit-shakes, coffee, teas, Belgian waffles, homemade cakes, sandwiches, yogurt, fruit plates, bagels, and more. Open Monday to Saturday from 6:30 am to 5 pm and Sunday 6:30 am to 2 pm.

$$ **Cafe Welchez**, at Marina Copán Hotel on the corner, serves light meals and a wide variety of coffee. The menu includes delicious quiche Lorraine, tortilla Española and the local specialty, *ticucos a la crema*, corn tamales filled with red beans and drenched with a rich cream sauce. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner daily from 6:30 am to 9:30 pm.

Nightlife

Copán Ruinas is a quiet town and most restaurants are closed by 10 pm. The Tunkul and Nía Lola and maybe some other places may stay open a little later: but just until around midnight. See *Where to Eat* above.

Getting to Guatemala

The El Florido border with Guatemala is only 7½ miles (12 km) from Copán Ruinas. You can continue your travels into the neighboring country or plan a short sojourn there from Copán Ruinas.

Budget transportation to El Florido is provided via pick-up trucks, which leave from the bridge on the western side of town every 30 minutes from 6 am to 4 pm and cost about $1. Make advance arrangements by talking to one of the drivers.

From the border, buses leave hourly until 6 pm for Chiquimula (36 miles/57 km). The trip takes an hour on a paved road.

Direct Shuttles to Antigua

Monarcas Travel is in the Casa de Todo, one block from the corner of Banco de Occident in the Central Plaza, ☎ 651-4185, www.mayabus.com. Monarcas runs two direct shuttles to Antigua each day at 4 am and 2 pm (6½ hours) for $15 one-way.

Hedman Alas, www.hedmanalas.com, also offers a daily shuttle from Copán Ruinas via Guatemala City to Antigua. The daily 1:30 pm departure from Copán arrives in Guatemala City at 6 pm ($35) and continues to Antigua ($6). On the return trip, there is a 4 am departure from Antigua to Guatemala City ($6). A 5 am departure from Guatemala City arrives in Copán Ruinas at 10:30 am ($35).

■ La Entrada

La Entrada is a small town at a major fork in the western highway (CA 4). CA 11 goes to Copán Ruinas and CA 4 runs to Santa Rosa de Copán and onto the El Poy border with El Salvador and the Agua Caliente border with Guatemala. The only reason to stop in La Entrada is to visit the El Puente Archaeological Site, which is the second-most important Mayan site in Honduras. You can see El Puente either on the way to or back from Copán Ruinas. A day-trip there from Copán Ruinas is another option. Remember if you're taking the bus en route to San Pedro Sula, Copán Ruins, or Santa Rosa de Copán, a stop in La Entrada means breaking up your

trip and carrying your luggage. For that reason,the day-trip from Copán Ruinas is the best choice.

Getting There

The **Etumi** bus company runs from Copán Ruinas to La Entrada hourly 6 am to 4:30 pm, with connections to Santa Rosa de Copán and San Pedro Sula. The bus stops in front of Hotel Posada.

El Puente Archaeological Site

The signed detour to the site is 2½ miles (four km) west of La Entrada on the road to Copán Ruinas. The visitor's center and ruins are a little over four miles (seven km) from the main highway down a paved road.

El Puente was an important satellite community under the dominion of Copán or Xukpi in the Late Classic Period. Opened to the public in 1994, the site is bordered by the Chinamito River. It contains more than 200 structures. Recent excavations have uncovered but a few buildings. These include Structure 1, which is a 36-foot-high pyramid containing burial chambers. Archaeologists dug a tunnel in another structure, which allows visitors a view of ancient carvings. Structures 4 and 5 were residential areas for the elite and even included a drainage system. At the visitor's center is a small museum with an informative exhibit about the site and the Maya culture, a cafeteria and a souvenir store. A nature trail follows the river on the western edge of the park and is a good place to watch for birds. Open daily 8 am to 4 pm. Entrance fee is $5.

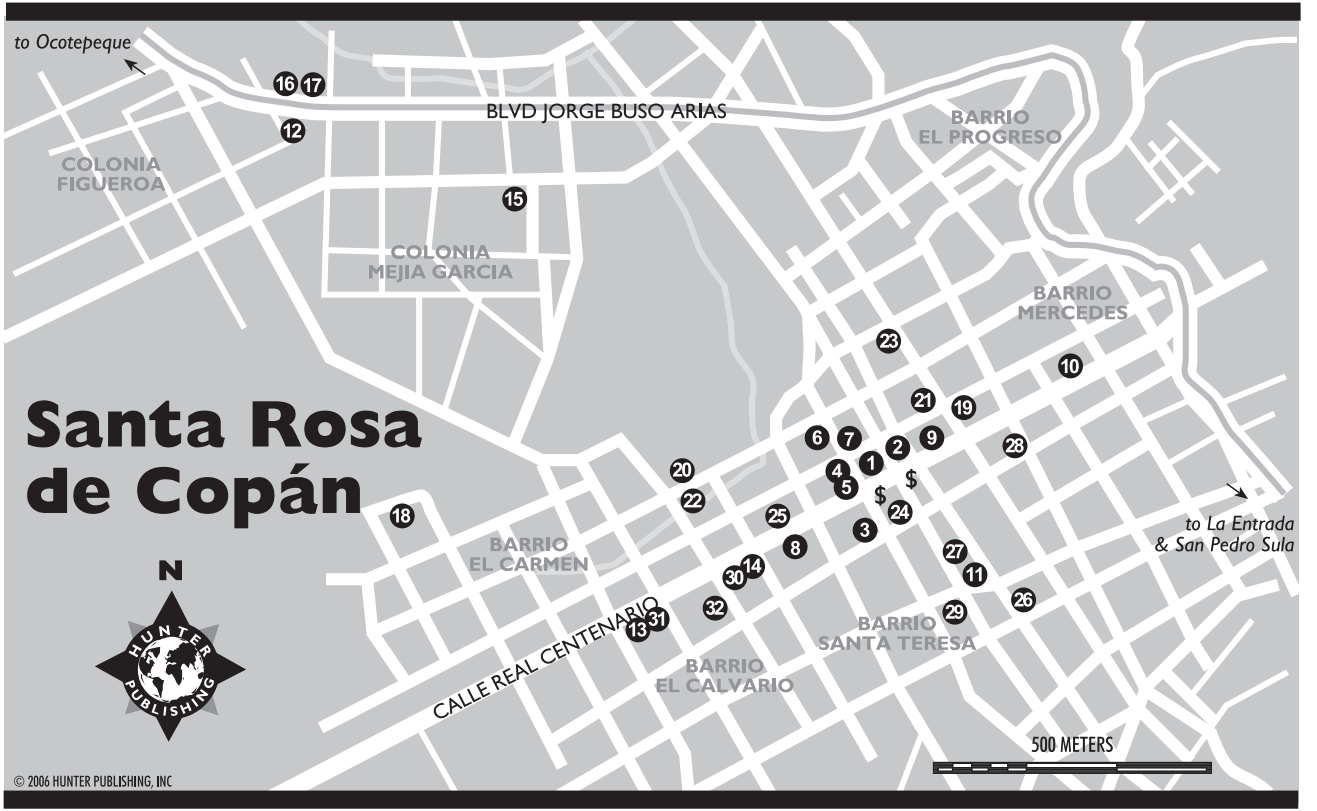
Practicalities

If you do end up staying in La Entrada, the $ **Hotel San Carlos**, ☎ 661-2228, offers 45 double rooms with fan or a/c and private bath, with hot water. The hotel also has a restaurant and a swimming pool.

For Internet access, try **CompuPrint**, half a block west of Hotel San Carlos.

■ Santa Rosa de Copán

This is the largest city in Western Honduras, with a population of over 25,000. It is also the transportation hub for the departments or states of Copán, Lempira and Ocotepeque and


to Ocotepeque
BLVD JORGE BUSO ARIAS
COLONIA FIGUEROA
COLONIA MEJIA GARCIA
BARRIO EL PROGRESO
BARRIO MERCEDES
Santa Rosa de Copán
N
BARRIO EL CARMEN
CALLE REAL CENTENARIO
BARRIO EL CALVARIO
BARRIO SANTA TERESA
to La Entrada & San Pedro Sula
500 METERS
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to the borders at Agua Caliente, Guatemala, and El Poy, El Salvador. Known by locals as "The Sultan of Western Honduras," this city of Colonial architecture and cobblestone streets is a bustling, commercial town. As it is on a hill above a verdant valley at an altitude of 3,900 feet (1,200 m), Santa Rosa de Copán also boasts nearly perfect weather with average temperatures from 75° to 80°F (24°-26.5°C).

History

Santa Rosa de Copán can trace its growth back to Colonial times when a tobacco factory, *La Real Factoria del Tabaco*, was established in 1765 as part of the Spanish monarchy's Royal Tobacco Monopoly in Spanish America. The monopoly formed part of an economic reform package aimed at regenerating the Spanish Empire and its goal was increasing fiscal revenues remitted to the crown. The program was successful in the Viceroyalty of New Spain or Mexico (included territory that is now Honduras) and eventually provided 20% of its total revenues. Unfortunately, for them, it did not help the Bourbon Dynasty from falling.

1. Central Park
2. Cathedral
3. Casa Bueso
4. Post Office
5. Phone Company
6. Immigration
7. Police
8. Flor de Copán showroom
9. Foto Tabora
10. Pizza Pizza Restaurant/Internet/Book Exchange
11. Computec (Internet)
12. Bus Terminal
13. Super Lavanadía
14. Lenca Land Trails, Hotel Elvir
15. Flor de Copán Cigar Factory
16. Hotel Santa Rosa
17. Hotel Grand Mayaland
18. La Posada de Juan B&B
19. Hotel VIP Copán
20. Hotel Continental
21. Hotel Rosario
22. Hotel Castillo
23. Hotel Blanca Nieves
24. Flamingo's Restaurant
25. Lily's Restaurant
26. Well Restaurant
27. El Rodeo Restaurant
28. Las Haciendas Restaurant
29. Chiky's Antijitos Mejicanos
30. Ten Napal Café
31. Comedor Pollito Dorado
32. La Casa Vieja

Nonetheless, the tobacco-based economy spurred the growth of the entire western region, with Santa Rosa de Copán at its head. In 1869, the Department of Copán was established and Santa Rosa de Copán was declared the departmental capital. Today, it is the commercial and political center of Western Honduras. Tobacco

and coffee production as well as cattle ranching are the region's main economic forces.

Getting There

By Bus

From San Pedro Sula

Toritos y Copánecos travels between San Pedro Sula, 6 Ave SO, 8-9 Calle, ☎ 553-4930; and Santa Rosa de Copán, Col. Miraflores, ☎ 662-0156. It runs:

Express departures (2¼ hours) at 8, 9:30 am, and 2 pm, for about $4.

Regular bus service (3½ hours) with stops along the way at 7, 8, 9:30 am, 11:30 am, 12:30, 2:30, and 3:30 pm for about $2.

Transportes Congolón travels between San Pedro Sula, 8 Ave SO, 9 y 10 Calle, ☎ 553-1174, via Santa Rosa de Copán, to Ocotepeque.It runs:

Regular bus service (3½ hours) with multiple stops at 6:30, 8:30, 10:30 am, 1, and 3:30 pm daily for about $2.

From Copán Ruinas

Unfortunately, I was unable to find anyone or any company offering direct bus service from Copán Ruinas to Santa Rosa de Copán.

From Copán Ruinas via La Entrada

Regular service from Copán Ruinas (in front of Hotel Posada) to La Entrada (two hours), hourly from 6 am to 4:30 pm, $1. From there catch a connecting bus (45 minutes) to Santa Rosa de Copán, about every half hour, $1.50.

From Tegucigalpa to Santa Rosa de Copán

La Sultana luxury service runs from Tegucigalpa's twin sister of Comayagüela, 8 Ave, 11 y 12 Calle, ☎ 237-8101, to Santa Rosa de Copán, Barrio Miraflores, ☎ 662-0940, along a beautiful scenic mountain route:

Direct Service (7½ hours), from Tegucigalpa to Santa Rosa de Copán at 6, 7:30, 8:30, 10 and 11:30 am daily for $9.

Direct Service (7½ hours), from Santa Rosa de Copán to Tegucigalpa at 4, 6, 9 am, and 10:30 pm daily for $9.

By Car

From San Pedro Sula

Santa Rosa de Copán is 95 miles (152 km) from San Pedro Sula. You must take the highway south out of town for five miles. The turn-off onto the Western Highway (CA 4) is just after the tollbooths and the gas station on the right side of the road. Remaining on the CA-4 will lead you directly to Santa Rosa de Copán.

From Copán Ruinas

Drive to La Entrada and turn right on CA-4 to get to Santa Rosa de Copán.

From Southern Honduras

Driving from Tegucigalpa or Southern Honduras to Santa Rosa de Copán entails driving to San Pedro Sula and taking the CA4 (Western Highway) west to Santa Rosa de Copán. A shorter route is north from Tegucigalpa and turning left at the Pito Solo turnoff just south of Lake Yojoa that leads to Santa Barbara. From Santa Barbara, the road north leads to the CA4, where you turn left and follow to Santa Rosa de Copán.

Getting Around

If you are driving, take the second entrance from the highway into town, which leads to the Central Plaza. Calle Centenario runs east-west along the park's south side and the Santa Rosa Cathedral is on the east side of the park.

From the bus terminal, which is little over a half-mile (.7 km) from the center of town, hire a taxi for about $1 into town. The walk into town is to the top of the hill where the Central Plaza is located.

Taxis charge a fixed fare of about 50¢ per person to anywhere in town.

Practicalities

Banking

Banco de Occidente, ☎ 662-0022, corner of the park, exchanges American Express traveler's checks and US dollars and has a Western Union office. Open weekdays from 8 am to noon and from 2 to 5 pm; Saturdays from 8 to 11:30 am.

Banco Atlántida, facing the park, will exchange US dollars and has an ATM that accepts Visa cards. Open weekdays 8 am to 3 pm and Saturdays 8-11 am.

Medical Services & Pharmacies

Hospital de Occidente, ☎ 662-0112, 662-0107. Follow Calle Centenario eight blocks west of the park, turn left right after the playground, and continue for one block. 24-hour emergency services.

The **Políclinica Santa Rosa**, three blocks west of the park on Calle Centenario, ☎ 662-1338. 24-hour emergency services.

Farmacia Central, Calle Centenario, facing Central Plaza, ☎ 662-0465.

Government Services

The **post office**, Honducor, is on the central plaza, opposite the church (open weekdays 8 am to noon, 2-4 pm, and Saturday 8 am to noon). Next door to the post office, the **phone company (Hondutel)**, offers phone and fax services (open daily 7 am to 9 pm). **Immigration** is one block west of the central plaza (open weekdays 8 am to noon, 2-4 pm).

The **police station**, on the north side facing the central plaza, ☎ 662-009, is open 24 hours. In the event of an emergency, call ☎ 199, or 662-0136, 662-0827.

Internet

The **Cyber Café at Pizza Pizza**, ☎ 662-1104, is a full service Internet café with e-mail and Internet access. Four blocks east of the central plaza on Calle Centenario, it is open daily except Wednesday. Visa cards accepted.

Zeus Cyber Café is two blocks from the park, ☎ 662-3535. Open weekdays 8 am to 10 pm, and weekends from 8 am to 9 pm.

Computec, 2 Ave, ☎ 662-1143, is two blocks southeast of the park.

Gambling

Cyber Fortuna Four Aces, Dubón Building, is across the street from the Multicolor Kiosk. Video poker and slot machines. Open Monday to Friday from 4 pm to midnight and on weekends from 1 pm to 1 am.

Laundry

Super Lavandería Florencia, 4½ blocks west of the southwest corner of the park on Calle Centenario, offers two-hour full-service for about $5 per load. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to noon and 1:30-5 pm.

Tour Operators

Lenca Land Trails, Hotel Elvir, ☎ 662-1374, lenca@hondutel.hn. Max Elvir, owner and long-time guide will customize a tour for you starting at $30 a day. Activities include bird-watching, trekking, camping, archaeological, botanical, cultural, mountain biking, horseback riding, and agricultural tours.

Annual Events

The town's annual fair, in honor of Santa Rosa de Lima, the city's patron saint, is held during the last two weeks of August. Activities include religious and cultural activities, parades, street carnivals, beauty pageant, and farm animal exhibits.

Shopping

Flor de Copán tobacco factory showroom, Calle Centenario, 1½ blocks west of the Central Plaza. Cigars for sale. Open Monday to Friday 7:30 am to noon and 2-4:30 pm, Saturday 7:30 am to noon.

Foto Tabora, one block east of the central plaza on Calle Centenario, ☎ 662-0089, 662-0414, offers one-hour photo developing and postcards for sale.

Sightseeing

To get to **Flor de Copán Cigar Factory**, turn right three blocks south of the bus terminal. This factory produces 20- to 30,000 hand-rolled cigars a day and offers a one-hour tour in Spanish for about $1.50. You will enjoy watching the process even if your Spanish is limited. There is no machinery. Workers seated on wooden benches hand roll the cigars, which are then placed in

wooden press molds with pre-forms or cavities to be pressed and trimmed. Open weekdays from 8 am to 4 pm and Saturday from 8-11 am.

Historical Center. Take a walk in the area around the Central Plaza restored in the late 1990s as part of a Colonial history preservation project. The **Santa Rosa Cathedral**, which forms part of this history, is on the park's east side. The church, a large whitewashed edifice with handmade wooden altars, is typical of the Colonial era.

Beneficio Maya Coffee Factory, Colonia Miraflores, ☎ 662-0484. Take a taxi to a coffee factory that produces two fine, high altitude coffees. The Café Copán brand uses only High Grown (HG) beans and is grown at an altitude of at least 3,000 feet (900 m); Café San Marcos Supremo uses only Strictly High Grown (SHG) beans and is grown at altitudes greater than 3,900 feet (1,200 m). The factory process includes roasting, grinding, and packing within 60 minutes. The best time to visit is during the coffee harvest from October to February. You can also taste and buy the coffee at the factory.

Casa de la Cultura, half a block south of the park, has a library and sponsors cultural events such as concerts, plays, and exhibitions of local artists. Stop by and see what is going on during your visit. They also provide very limited travel information.

Doricentro, a privately owned park in the village of La Montañita, is a 10-minute bus ride on the road to Gracias (Lps. 10). Open on holidays and weekends, facilities include natural swimming pools, a water toboggan, a picnic area and a snack bar. Admission is about $2.

Balneario Ecoturístico Las Tres Jotas (JJJ) is 15 miles (24 km) or about an hour by bus on the road to Gracias. Ask the bus driver to drop you off there. A private park featuring wading pools of mountain spring water, a fishery, and a tobacco farm. There is also a cafeteria, which of course serves the freshest of fish, as well as other typical meals and snacks. Admission and swimming is $1. Lunch is $3. Open daily 7 am to 6:30 pm.

Where to Stay

Moderate

$$ **Hotel Elvir**, Calle Centenario, 2 Ave SO, ☎ 662-0805, fax 662-1374, lenca@hondutel.hn, hotelelvir@globalnet.com. This Colonial-style hotel is the best one in Santa Rosa de Copán and the favorite lodging of many Hondurans and expats while visiting. Accommodations include 44 clean, large, and comfortable rooms, with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. There is a restaurant, café, bar and swimming pool. Rates are about $50 for a double. Tour operator Lenca Land Trails is also here.

$ **Hotel Santa Rosa**, ☎ 662-2366/67, on the highway exit to San Pedro Sula. Very cute hotel designed in a style similar to that found throughout rural Honduras, with whitewashed walls, red tiled floor, and an open corridor wrapping around an inner courtyard filled with plants. Rooms are large and well-furnished with two double beds, private bath, hot water, cable TV, a/c, and telephone. Includes restaurant, bar and private parking.

$ **La Posada de Juan Bed & Breakfast**, half a block east of the Universidad Católica, ☎ 662-0254, laposadadejuan@hotmail.com. Santa Rosa's newest option, La Posada de Juan, is a recently renovated home offering just four rooms with private bath, hot water, fan and TV. Reservations are recommended. $30 for a double.

$ **Hotel VIP Copán**, two blocks east of the northeast corner of the park, ☎ 662-2284. This elegant hotel offers 42 well-decorated rooms with a/c or fan, private bath, hot water, cable TV, phone. Eight suites also have a mini-bar and a bathtub. Offers parking, a business center with Internet service, swimming pools for adults and children, and the Maya World Restaurant. $30 for a double.

$ **Hotel Continental**, 2 Calle, 2-3 Ave NO, opposite the Esso station, ☎ 662-0801. There are 40 rooms, each with two double beds, private bath, hot water, a/c and telephone.

$ **Hotel Grand Mayaland**, ☎ 662-0233. Mayaland is conveniently opposite the bus terminal, offering modern rooms with fan, private bath, hot water, cable TV, and phone. Restaurant and swimming pool.

Inexpensive

Hotel Rosario, 3 Ave NE, ☎ 662-0211, has 20 clean and basic rooms with private bath.

Hotel Castillo, 3 Ave NO, 1-2C NO, ☎ 662-0368. This budget accommodation offers 29 basic, small rooms with private bath and TV, but without fans.

Cheaper Still

Hotel Blanca Nieves (Snow White), two blocks east and two blocks north from the northeast corner of the Central Plaza, ☎ 662-3012. Accommodations are very basic with shared bath.

Where to Eat

$-$$ **Restaurante Lily's**, two blocks west of park, ☎ 662-1733. This cozy restaurant, situated in an old Colonial building with courtyard dining and a wooden bar, serves well-prepared chicken, beef and seafood French cuisine. Full-service bar also sells Honduran cigars. Open for lunch and dinner Monday to Saturday from 11 am to 10 pm.

$-$$ **Hotel Elvir Cafeteria** serves well-prepared Honduran and international food. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

$-$$ **Flamingo's** is half a block south of Banco de Occidente on the corner of the Central Plaza, ☎ 662-0654. This restaurant offers fine dining and excellent service in a very pink setting. The international menu includes pastas, salads, seafood, and beef. Full-bar service. Open Wednesday to Monday from 11:30 am to 9 pm.

$ **Pizza Pizza**, four blocks east of the central plaza, ☎ 662-1104, offers inexpensive lunch specials, excellent brick oven pizza with topping choices, pastas, sandwiches and burgers. Other services and products include fine cigars for sale, book exchange, and an Internet Café. The friendly owner, US expat Warren Post, provides sound travel information about

Santa Rosa de Copán and the surrounding area. Open Thursday to Tuesday from 11:30 am to 9 pm.

$ **La Casa Vieja** (The Old House) is one block south and five or six blocks west of The centRal plaza. This restaurant is in a 200-year-old house and serves up typical Honduran fare from a traditional wood-burning stove. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 9 pm.

$ **Restaurante Well**, ☎ 662-1671, two blocks south of park, is a Chinese restaurant that serves large portions of such fare as Chinese rice, chop suey, won tons, sweet and sour pork, chicken and beef at reasonable prices. Open from 11 am to 9 pm.

$-$$ **El Rodeo**, ☎ 662-0697, 1½ blocks south of the park. Santa Rosa de Copán's best steak house with full bar service open from 11:30 am to around midnight.

$ **Restaurante Las Haciendas**, ☎ 662-3518, one block south and 2½ blocks east of the southeast corner of The centRal plaza. The varied menu offers international and Honduran-style platters, including sandwiches. Full bar service with TV. Open from 11 am to 10 pm.

$ **Chiky's Antijitos Mejicanos**, one block south of park, offers inexpensive beer and Honduran-style fast food snacks such as tacos, sandwiches, and burgers.

$ **Ten Napel Café**, next to Hotel Elvir, ☎ 662-3238. A nice coffee shop, which serves sandwiches, bagels, croissants and other pastries, as well as delicious coffee

$ **Comedor Pollito Dorado**, ☎ 662-1357, a block west of Hotel Elvir. Typical eatery that serves such fare as egg and bean *baleadas* for breakfast and tacos, enchiladas and fried chicken for lunch and dinner. Open daily 7 am to 10 pm.

Leaving Santa Rosa

Santa Rosa is the transportation hub for the departments of Copán, Lempira and Ocotepeque and to the borders of Agua Caliente, Guatemala, and El Poy, El Salvador. From Santa Rosa's bus terminal on the main highway west of town transportation to anywhere in the region and beyond is available throughout the day.

To San Pedro Sula

Toritos y Copánecos offers express service (2½ hours); at 8, 9:30 am, and 2 pm, $4.

Toritos y Copánecos and Congolón offer regular service (3½ hours) every half-hour from 4 am to 6 pm, $2.50.

To Copán Ruinas via La Entrada

Services to La Entrada are the same as to San Pedro Sula. You just get off at La Entrada (45 minutes) and pay less ($1.50). Connect from La Entrada to Copán Ruinas (two hours); hourly service from 6 am to 4:30 pm.

To Gracias

Regular service (45 minutes) leaves hourly from 7 am to 4:30 pm, $1.50.

To Nueva Ocotepeque

Toritos y Copánecos, ☎ 662-0156, and **Empresa Escobar**, ☎ 662-0840. Between these two companies, regular service is provided (2½ hours) hourly from 6:30 am to 5 pm, $2.50.

From & to Tegucigalpa

La Sultana luxury service runs from Tegucigalpa's twin sister of Comayagüela, 8 Ave, 11 y 12 Calle, ☎ 237-8101, to Santa Rosa de Copán, Barrio Miraflores, ☎ 662-0940, along a beautiful scenic mountain route.

Direct Service (7½ hours), from Tegucigalpa to Santa Rosa de Copán at 6, 7:30, 8:30, 10 and 11:30 am daily. $9.

Direct Service (7½ hours), from Santa Rosa de Copán to Tegucigalpa at 4, 6, 9 am, and 10:30 pm. ☎ 662-0940/662-0151. $9.

■ Gracias

Gracias is a small mountain town in western Honduras on the banks of the Arcagual River. The cloud-covered Celaque Mountain, the tallest peak in the country, soars in the background of this lovely town steeped in Colonial and indigenous history.

Although extremely rural, there is plenty to do in the area around Gracias. This is the gateway to the Lenca Trail. Several villages are in the vicinity and can be easily visited.

The Lenca are the largest indigenous group found in Honduras and number around 100,000. They reside mainly in the Departments of Lempira and Intibuca, and their strong cultural roots can be seen in their religious customs, traditional foods, and their fine handicrafts, which include pottery, embroidery, and basket weaving.

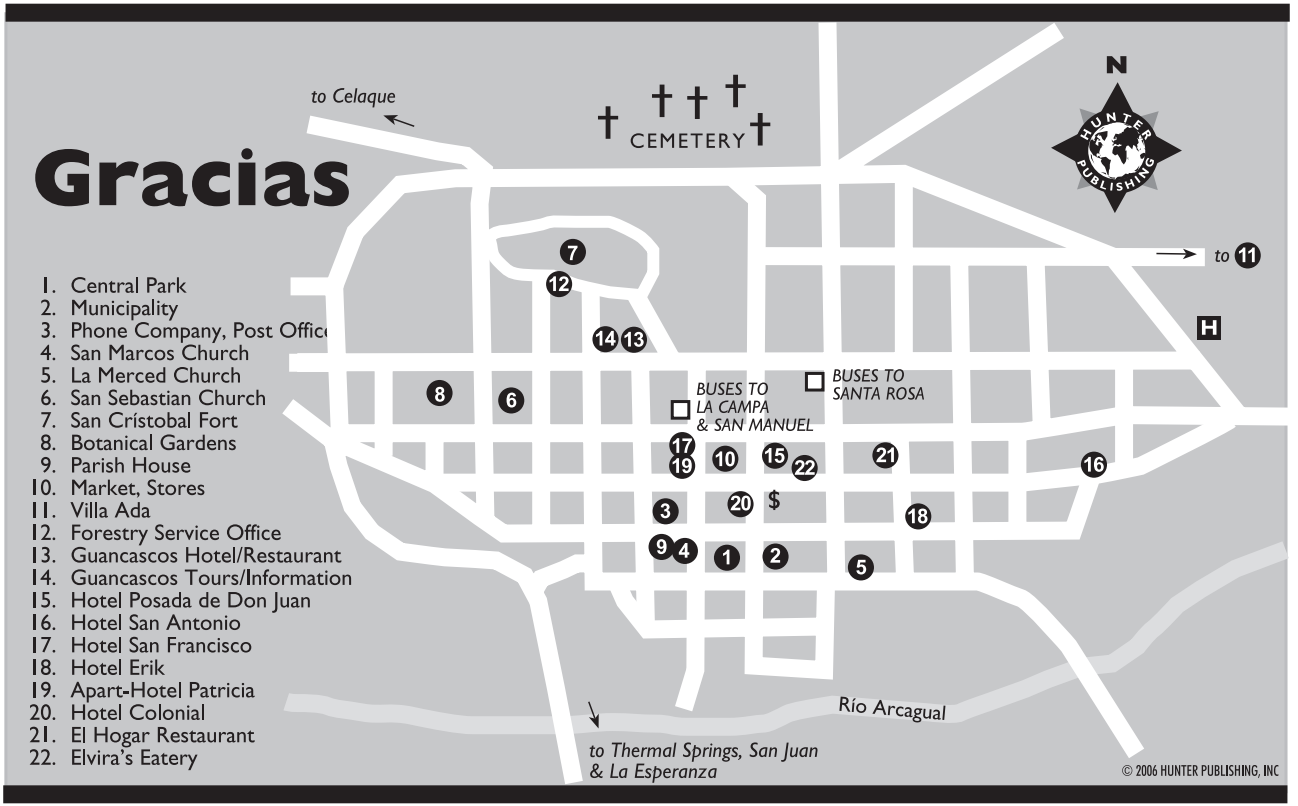
You can hike in the Celaque National Park for a few hours or a couple of days. You can hike to Lenca villages near Gracias for day-trips or hike from town to town. Or arrange with a local tour operator to go horseback riding, or take archaeological, cultural, and botanical tours of the region with a guide. The recommended operator is **Lenca Land Trails** out of Santa Rosa de Copán, run by Max Elvir, ☎ 662-1374, lenca@hondutel.hn. He has years of experience and extensive knowledge of the region. There are also some nearby hot springs, which are easily accessible.

The town's Colonial heritage is clearly visible. Gracias has four Colonial churches, the San Cristobal Fort, and several other buildings dating back as far as the 17th century.

History

Gracias is the capital of the Department of Lempira, which is named after the heroic Lenca warrior Lempira. He held out the longest against Spanish domination in the 1500s before being treacherously murdered in 1538. The Spaniards, who were seeking to establish a base from where they could fight indigenous resistance to the conquest, founded the town in 1836. According to legend, Captain Juan de Chavez had spent several days searching for an adequate location when he came upon a flat area where the town is now and said "Gracias a Díos que hemos hallado tierra llana!" (Thank God we have finally found flat land!). Thus, the name Gracias a Díos that later was shortened to Gracias.

In 1544, the first capital of Honduras, and the *Audiencia de los Confines*, or government headquarters of Central America under the Spanish, was established in Gracias. But regional rivalry prevailed and in 1548 the *Audiencia de los Confines* was forced to move to Antigua, Guatemala. The capital of Honduras was also later moved to Comayagua, which had


Gracias
1. Central Park
2. Municipality
3. Phone Company, Post Offic
4. San Marcos Church
5. La Merced Church
6. San Sebastian Church
7. San Crístobal Fort
8. Botanical Gardens
9. Parish House
10. Market, Stores
11. Villa Ada
12. Forestry Service Office
13. Guancascos Hotel/Restaurant
14. Guancascos Tours/Information
15. Hotel Posada de Don Juan
16. Hotel San Antonio
17. Hotel San Francisco
18. Hotel Erik
19. Apart-Hotel Patricia
20. Hotel Colonial
21. El Hogar Restaurant
22. Elvira's Eatery
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BUSES TO LA CAMPA & SAN MANUEL
BUSES TO SANTA ROSA
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Río Arcagual
to Thermal Springs, San Juan & La Esperanza
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increased in importance due to silver mines established in that area.

Getting There

Suggested Routes

San Pedro Sula-Copán Ruinas-Santa Rosa de Copán-Gracias

San Pedro Sula-Santa Rosa de Copán-Gracias

It is a good idea to approach Gracias through Santa Rosa de Copán, if only to get your bearings in the region's transportation hub.

By Bus

From San Pedro Sula

Gracianos, 6 y 7 Ave SO, 6 Calle, offers express service (four hours) to San Pedro Sula at 2 pm. with a stop in Santa Rosa de Copán Rosa.

From Santa Rosa de Copán

Lempira Bus, ☎ 656-1414, offers regular service (45 minutes) leaving hourly from the bus terminal at 5 am tthrough 4:30 pm. $1.50.

From La Esperanza

Two buses a day (1½ hours) leave at 6 am and 1 pm from one block south of the park. Be warned that the road is unpaved and, depending on the time of the year, can be in very bad shape. The journey can take anywhere from 2½ to six hours. $3.

Practicalities

Banking, Internet & Shopping

Banco de Occidente, ☎ 656-1024, half a block west of the park, offers currency exchange and cashes traveler's checks. Open weekdays 8:30 am to 4:30 pm and Saturday 8 am to noon.

Internet access is provided at the **Hotel Guancascos** free of charge for guests and for a fee to non-guests. **Millennium Computer School Cyber Café**, one block to the right of the church, ☎ 656-1140, is open daily 8 am to noon and 2 pm-8 pm.

The local market is three blocks west of the park and sells general food provisions.

Government Services

The **post office** (Honducor), open weekdays 8 am to noon, 2-4 pm, and Saturday 8 am to noon, is one block south of the park. Next door is the **phone company (Hondutel)**, ☎ 656-1003, which is open daily 7 am to 9 pm. The **regional forestry office** (COHDEFOR), five blocks north of the park, sells photocopied maps of the trails in the Celaque National Park.

Tour Operators

Lenca Land Trails, Hotel Elvir, Santa Rosa de Copán, ☎ 662-1374, lenca@hondutel.hn. Max Elvir, owner and long-time guide, will customize a tour for you starting at $30 a day. Activities offered include bird-watching, trekking, camping, archaeological, botanical, cultural, mountain biking, horseback riding, and agricultural tours.

Celaque Aventuras, Hotel Guancascos, Gracias, three blocks south (up) from the bus terminal or east of the Fort, ☎ 656-1219, www.guancascos.com, info@guancascos.com, offers a variety of tours to the Celaque Mountain and areas surrounding Gracias.

Sightseeing

Colonial Fort

Castillo San Cristobal is on a hill on the west side of town, a 15-minute walk from town. Juan Lindo, president of Honduras from 1847 to 1852, built the fort in the 19th century to defend the area during a general state of regional unrest and civil wars. It was never used, however. His tomb is inside the fort and there are still two of the original cannons. Perched on a hill as it is, the fort offers some great views of the surround area, including the town below and the Celaque Mountain range. Open daily 8 am to 5 pm. Admission is free.

Colonial Buildings

Take a walk on the cobbled street around town to see original Colonial architecture and visit three Colonial churches. **La Merced Church** was built in the early 1600s; the **San Marcos Church** was built much later next to the original site of the Audiencia de los Confines; and the **San Sebastián**

Church, which celebrates a Guancasco ceremony with the nearby church of **Santa Rosa de Copán Lucia**, in the adjoining village of Mejicapa. Gracias is one of the oldest towns in Honduras and the building that housed the Central American government center *Audiencia de los Confines* in 1544 is now the parochial center. Another Colonial house is a handicraft shop. **Casa Galeano**, still another famous Colonial home, will soon house the Lenca Interpretation Center.

Adventures on Water

Hot Springs (Aguas Termales)

About four miles (6½ km) from Gracias are a group of natural hot springs with three stone pools for bathing in the 93-95°F (34-35°C) waters. A small eatery serves beers, sodas, snacks, and typical basic platters. Take the path that turns right after crossing the first bridge on the road to La Esperanza and you can walk there in about an hour. Open daily from 8 am to 8 pm; a bathing suit is required. Admission is about $2. Inner tubes, towels, and hammocks are available for rent. This is a popular local weekend outing and can get quite crowded.

Villa de Ada

On the outskirts of town, this attraction includes swimming pools for both children and adults, and a man-made lagoon/fishpond with rowboats for rent. The restaurant serves typical platters and their fresh tilapia specialty.

Eco-Adventures

Celaque National Park

Gracias is at the foot of the Celaque National Park, a mysterious and lush forest reserve extending over 100 square miles (256 sq km), with an average altitude of 5,900 feet (1,800 m) and the highest peak in Honduras at its center, Cerro Las Minas (9,347 feet/2,849 m). From Gracias, the mountain's plateau (2,050 feet/625 m) and its nearly vertical walls are clearly visible. The same plateau contains the headwaters of Honduras' highest river, which gently flows to the edge of the plateau

and then plunges downward, creating a splendid waterfall. Most of the park is in the Department of Lempira, with smaller portions extending into the Departments of Copán and Intibuca.

> **Celaque** means "green box of water" in the local Lenca dialect. It's an appropriate description as the mountain is the source of 11 rivers that provide water to over 100 communities in the area.

High-altitude cloud forests are covered with a persistent mist or horizontal rain. Mount Celaque receives 80 to 100 inches of rain (2,000-2,500 mm) a year. Celaque also has several different types of rare ecosystems, with more endemic plants than almost any area of Central America. At the higher level, a mixture of tropical broad-leafed cloud forest and strands of pine are swathed with moss, lichens, ferns and epiphytes such as bromeliads and orchids. This mountain is unique in Honduras as it also has small high mountain savannahs or grasslands. Wildlife found here includes tapirs, jaguars, ocelots, pumas, raccoons, peccaries, white-faced monkeys, deer, squirrels, and over 150 species of birds, including emerald toucanets, quetzals and collared trogons.

Getting There

The park entrance is a little more than three miles (five km) from Gracias. You can arrange for a ride there (see below or ask at any hotel), wave down a pick-up going that way and offer to pay for the ride, or walk. However, remember that wildlife spotting is best in the early morning. You will lose time on the trails in the park if you walk to the park itself. One option is to walk there in the afternoon and spend the night. That way you will be fresh for the next day's trekking. To walk to the visitor's center, take the dirt road out of town to Mejicapa, and from there follow the marked trail to the entrance. Just before the entrance on the right side of the road is a small house where you pay the entrance fee and for lodging.

Information/Guides

Guancascos Hotel/Restaurant, ☎ 656-1219, www.guancascos.com, info@guancascos.com, sells information booklets and maps, rents camping equipment, offers guide services (Spanish speaking only) and provides transportation to and from the visitor's center ($10 for up to four people, one-way). They also rent sleeping bags and two-person tents. You should make plans the previous day, including your return trip.

Forestry Services (COHDEFOR), Castillo de San Cristóbal, ☎ 656-1362, provides updated information on the park, which includes topographical maps. Open daily 8 am to 5 pm.

The house at the **Park entrance** where you pay admission and lodging fees is the home of Doña Angela. Doña Angela cooks meals for visitors, provides simple lodging, and two of her sons work as park guides. They charge from $20 to $30 for a guided tour of the mountain.

The **Visitor's Center** is a walk of half an hour uphill from the entrance at an elevation of nearly 4,500 feet (1,400 m). Admission to the park is Lps. 30 ($2.15) and lodging is Lps. 10 (70¢) a night.

The Visitor's Center lodge is very basic and provides bunks (no bedding), showers, a sink, and outdoor toilets with running water. There is also a wood stove for cooking, with pots and pans.

What to Take

If you plan to overnight at the Visitor's Center take candles, a flashlight (no electricity), sleeping bags, food, and water. Good, typical Honduran meals can be bought at the caretaker's home near the Visitor's Center for about $1.50. You should bring snacks for the trail and water purifiers if you do not want to carry water in from town or drink straight from the streams.

What to Wear

Bring an extra change of clothing as frequent rainfall creates muddy and slippery trails. You should wear hiking boots, warm clothes, and a waterproof jacket.

Trails

The following trails do not require a guide as they are well marked.

There is one **main trail** (3¼ miles/six km) to the peak, which is a strenuous seven- to eight-hour hike from the visitor's center. Plan on at least a two-day adventure to reach the summit and enjoy the journey. Your best bet is to overnight in the park and start out fresh the next morning on the tough upward climb. Try getting there early enough to reach the first campsite, *Campamento Don Tomas.* The peak is still four to six hours from there. Alternatively, spend the night at the Visitor's Center, climb to the peak the next day and plan to camp on the way down.

The **waterfall view trail** branches of the main trail from the first rest area and takes about four to five hours round-trip.

Another shorter option (one to 1½ days) is to get a ride to the Visitor's Center, then trek to the second campsite, *El Naranjo*, where the cloud forest begins

The organic coffee farm, near the Visitor's Center and half an hour into the park, is a good place to bird-watch.

Trail Details

The main trail starts behind the Visitor's Center at 4,600 feet (1,400 m), and is marked with red or blue signs. You must cross two log bridges before you begin to ascend steeply. Half an hour to an hour later, you reach the rest area (*Area de Descanso*) at 5,905 feet (1,800 m). From here, you can either take the path to the right that leads to the waterfall or continue climbing up the mountain by following the trail to the left The marker for the waterfall trail reads *Sendero Mirador de la Cascada* or Waterfall View Trail. The waterfall takes about an hour to reach and provides a spectacular view.

The trail (1½-two hours) from the rest area to the first camping area, *Campamento Don Tomas*, at 6,725 feet (2,050 m) runs through thick pine/oak forest and crosses several small streams. This section is not as steep as the first leg of the journey. At the campsite, there is a dilapidated old tin shack and a newer mud hut with simple bunks and an outhouse. If it is not raining you might prefer sleeping in a tent or even outside.

The trail between *Campamento Don Tomas* and the next camping area, *Campamento Naranjo*, just short of 8,400 feet (2,560 m), is the hardest part to cover. The path is very steep and often muddy. It can take two to three hours to reach the plateau. In some places, the path is so steep and muddy you have to hold on to vines and rocks to get up it. The campsite on the edge of the plateau does not offer much: only some flat spots to pitch your tent, an open fire pit and a nearby stream. However, the transition from mainly pine-oak forest to the broadleaf cloud forest is truly impressive. The temperature is cooler among the huge trees covered in moss and vines at this higher level. You will also have a better chance of spotting wildlife here.

From Naranjo, the *Cerro Las Minas* summit at 9,347 feet (2,849 m) is a relatively easy two-hour hike. Only the last half-hour is uphill and the immense cloud forest at the top of the mountain will reward all your efforts. Listen for the lovely, fluted song of the shy jilguero (gold-finch). Walk quietly in the dripping forest in search of the elusive wildlife here. Search for toucans and resplendent quetzals in the huge trees, which are covered with moss, bromeliads, and orchids, forming a canopy 150 feet (46 m) high. There is a wooden cross at the peak and, if there aren't too many clouds, you'll be able to enjoy breathtaking views of the valleys and slopes covered with thick forests.

The Road Less Traveled

You can also hike to the peak on the southern side of the mountain from either Belén Gualcho or San Manuel Colohete. You will need a guide as the paths are infrequently used and it takes from two to four days to make the trip. Inquire at the Forestry Office (COHDEFOR), ☎ 656-1362, in Gracias, where they sell topographical maps that include the trails, or at the Guancascos Hotel, where Celaque Aventuras can make arrangements or provide a tour.

Where to Stay

$ **Patricia Apart-Hotel**, 1½ blocks west from the southwest corner of the park, ☎ 656-1281, is the fanciest hotel in town. Accommodations include five huge rooms with private bath, hot water, and

cable TV. There is also a suite with five beds, living room and terrace.

$ **Hotel Guancascos** is three blocks south (up) from the bus terminal or east of the Fort, ☎ 656-1219, www.guancascos.com, info@guancascos.com. This quiet, hillside hotel is very comfortable and most popular with backpackers. Accommodations include 14 comfortable rooms with high ceilings, tile floors, a large window (some with a beautiful view of the mountains), and ceiling fan, double beds, a private bath, with hot water and optional cable TV for an additional cost. Amenities include a terrace, restaurant/bar with a view, books, souvenirs, and free Internet. Two cabins are also available for rent bordering the Celaque Mountain. Both hotel and cabins cost about $20 for double occupancy. Ask for Frony, who also provides great travel information.

$ **Hotel Don Juan** is half a block west of the park, opposite Banco de Occidente, ☎ 656-1020. Accommodations include 24 rooms that open onto an interior courtyard, large clean rooms, with private bath, hot water and cable TV.

Hotelito San Marcos, ☎ 656-1474, has nine large, clean rooms with private bath, fan and TV for a single with a private bathroom, fan, and TV.

Hotel Erick is two blocks north of the park, ☎ 656-1066. A favorite backpacker lodging, this hotel has 24 clean and airy rooms with private bath and fan. There is a restaurant and bar on premises.

Hotel Colonial, ☎ 656-1258, is one block east of the park. This inexpensive downtown hotel offers large rooms with fans, some with private bath and TV.

Where to Eat

$ **Restaurante Guancascos**, Hotel Guancascos. The restaurant is on a large covered terrace with a view and it serves international, Honduran and vegetarian platters, sodas, beer and fresh fruit juices. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

$ **La Fonda**, Central Plaza, offers typical foods of the area, with a small menu. Open from 10 am to 10 pm for lunch and dinner.

$ **Repostería y Pizzeria La Esquisita**, sells baked goods and a variety of pizzas at modest prices.

$ **Hotel Colonial's Restaurant**, one block east of the park, serves typical platters and good breakfasts.

$-$$ **El Hogar**, one block east of the Central Plaza, has specialty platters, conch soup, and great fresh bread.

■ The Lenca Adventure

The western highlands from Gracias to La Esperanza are scattered with charming Colonial mountain villages inhabited by the Lenca indigenous group. All of the villages have a rich Colonial and indigenous background and most have at least one Colonial era church. The surrounding mountain countryside is lovely, possibilities for hiking are endless, and it is possible to hike from one village to the next. Standard amenities such as hotels and restaurants are few. But, if you ask around, the friendly inhabitants will always provide you with an inexpensive meal and even a place to sleep if necessary. Another option is a day-trip out of either Gracias or Santa Rosa de Copán by bus to the closer villages. Or rent a four-wheel drive vehicle to wander farther. Both **Lenca Land Trails**, ☎ 662-1374, out of Santa Rosa de Copán, and **Celaque Aventuras**, ☎ 656-1219, in Gracias, can provide you with customized tours of the region, depending on what you would like to do. See *Tour Operators*.

In May 2005, the Honduran Institute of Tourism announced the *Posada Lenca* project, which means Lenca Lodgings, planned to be put up along the Lenca trail. Maybe by the time you get here some of them will have been built. The first one is slated for La Campa, where part of the Parish House will be converted into accommodations.

The Lenca People

The Lenca indigenous group of approximately 100,000 people lives in approximately 100 villages and hamlets throughout the departments of La Paz, Intibucá, and Lempira; and to a much lesser degree in the departments of Santa Bárbara, Comayagua, Francisco Morazán and Valle. Many communities are in high-altitude regions of 5,000 feet (1,650 m) above

sea level with cool temperatures and unfertile soils. The Lenca cultural traditions are clearly visible in their everyday life. During your visit, you will be able to observe these traditional methods of sowing and harvesting traditional crops, preparation of traditional foods, and the production of handicrafts such as pottery and colorful woven straw products such as baskets, hats and mats.

History

Approximately 500 Lenca settlements were scattered throughout the region prior to the arrival of the Spanish. Although separated by large distances, they shared cultural ties and a common history. Each group inhabited a well-defined area headed by a chief. Lenca society was based on a caste system of priests, warriors, and nobles, followed by loyal subjects and slaves. War was common between the different communities. But the four main groups all spoke the same language, and would make temporary peace agreements (*guancascos*) to achieve a desired goal. Today's *guancasco* tradition can be traced to this system of political alliances, which lead to fortified political structures and unified economies. Two basic socioeconomic characteristics define the Lenca as a Mesoamerican culture: a hierarchical society and agriculture production methods based on seed crops.

Traveler and scientist, E.G. Squier, upon hearing the inhabitants of Guajiquiro, in the department of La Paz, refer to their own language as *Lenca* and noting linguistic similarities throughout the western region of Honduras, coined the term Lenca in the year 1853.

Spanish colonization of Honduras brought about the violent destruction of the indigenous socioeconomic organization. Conquest was not easy in the case of the Lenca, who strongly resisted for more than 20 years, until the death of the great Lenca hero Lempira. Colonization eventually led to the loss of the Lenca language at the end 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Today, as with many Native American groups, the Lenca culture is being slowly lost through assimilation into mainstream culture and the consequent loss of cultural traditions.

Lenca Religion

The religious beliefs of Hondurans of Lenca heritage are a mixture of Colonial Spanish Catholicism and pre-Hispanic beliefs. The basic Mesoamerican religious precepts of animism, a hierarchical structure of spiritual entities, complex prayers, offerings, Nahualism, and a small degree of shamanism, are all included.

> **Nahualism** is the relationship between every human being and his or her "animal protector."

To the Lenca, religion is the unifying force of their culture. The *Varas* or Staffs Ceremony is a fundamental symbol of this unity. Persons who hold office form the body of authority that extends throughout the community. Traditionally, religious officials were in charge of organizing festivities, overseeing land titles, and in general, making sure traditions were kept and respected. Today, many of these functions have been taken over by municipal governments. But there are some villages that maintain the tradition and have an auxiliary Lenca Town Hall, which works in unison with local government authorities.

The best-known ceremony is the **Guancasco Festival**. During the pre-Hispanic era the Guancasco was a celebration between two towns that had come to a peace agreement with the purpose of joining forces. Today, it is a peace ceremony between two towns celebrated during the yearly festival in honor of the town's patron saint, when the host town receives the peace offering from the visiting town. On the day of the visit, religious authorities accompanied by musicians carry on their shoulders a replica (statue or doll) of the town's Patron Saint on a portable altar and a flag to meet the authorities of the other town. The two groups meet, bow to each other, and wave the respective flags of each saint. The flag waving part is called *las reverencias*. Greetings are exchanged and prayers said. After the greeting ceremony, both images, with all the visitors and those who greeted them, are taken back to the town and rest outside the church. Participating towns in Honduras usually attend more than one Guancasco a year: the ceremony in which they are hosts and one or two festivals to which they are invited. Some towns have special dances they

perform during the ceremony, such as the *Dance of the Brooms or Escobas* and the *Dance of the Black Iguana or Garrob*o.

Elements of Lenca Mythology

The **raven** is the discoverer of corn. Ravens have the habit of taking corncobs from collected bundles during the harvest and hiding them in caves. They take the hidden cobs out to eat when corn is scarce.

The **armadillo** and the **opossum** are the discoverers of the clouds. The armadillo and the opossum were digging around in the dirt and, by pure chance, came upon the clouds shut up in some clay pots. They broke the pots and freed the clouds, but only to capture them for themselves. When the angels (see below) found out about this happening, they captured the armadillos and the opossums and took away the clouds.

Angels form part of a divine organization and are assigned different tasks, such as bringing rain, winds, soil fertility, evil, etc. They let their presence be known to humans through lightning (angels). When lightning strikes a tree, inhabitants should carry out a ceremony to restore and reconcile their relationship with these supernatural beings.

Mythical rites associated with angels affect the daily life of more traditional Lenca people. The supernatural beings are capable of creating personal, family, and community chaos and disaster. Therefore, it is necessary to control their anger by carrying out complex rituals in their honor.

Chalchiguas are carved, green stones (jadeite) that once brought good luck. The Indians would keep them in dried gourds. Unfortunately, when the Spanish came, the people began to believe in Santiago (Catholicism), and the *chalchiguas* stopped bringing good luck. The Indians buried the *chalchiguas* deep in the earth after they realized that they no longer worked. The *chalchiguas* will only return when the people stop believing in Santiago (renounce Catholicism).

Guardian angels or ***nahuals*** are animal protectors. All individuals are born with a *nahual* and their lives are intimately related to the well being of the animal that is their *nahual*, including sickness and death. A person's *nahual* is recognizable through different events as well as by characteristics identifying the person with a particular animal.

The Lenca Trail

La Campa is a small village 10 miles (16 km) from Gracias that makes for a perfect day-trip. Minibuses and pick-ups leave for La Campa regularly; ask at your hotel. You can also walk there along a mountain road with little traffic. The **San Matías Church**, in the center of this idyllic village, was built in the early 1700s and has a beautiful hand-carved altar and hand-painted statues of saints. La Campa is also famous for the quality of the pottery produced by local Lenca women. They use red clay obtained from the nearby hills, which gives their handicrafts a unique color. A Lenca pottery interpretation center (museum) is slated to open in La Campa in 2006.

LENCA POTTERY

The beautiful handmade pottery crafted by Lenca women is one of the oldest traditions in Honduras. Pre-Hispanic shapes, techniques, and finishes have been handed down from generation to generation of Lenca women, who use only their hands and a few natural implements to create each unique piece. The clay they use is dug from the ground near their workstation (often their home) and is then washed and refined until it is ready for use. The color of the clay reflects its origin and is either brown, dark brown, red, or white. Permission is sought from the "The Owner of the Clay," a revered spiritual entity, to use the clay before the piece is formed into a decorative object or something utilitarian such as a pitcher, pot, or pan.

The artist then chooses the style she wants to decorate the piece. Different methods are used to decorate the pottery, such as cutouts, overlays, painting and dripping. The pattern and glazing is applied in a relief coat, which consists of additional clay mixed with natural ingredients to enhance the color of the

piece and the design. The molded object is then fired in an open wood-burning fire or single chamber oven. Next, the artist spends many hours buffing the piece with a flint stone to enhance the depth of the design and give the piece a smooth waxed look or burnish. Many times the piece is fired and burnished more than once until it acquires the desired appearance. A light coat of beeswax is applied for the final buffing.

La Campa celebrates its Guancasco Festival with Belen from February 15 to 24 in La Campa for St. Matthew and from December 17-23 in Belen for the Virgin of the Rosary. During the ceremony when the two towns greet one another, a dancer from La Campa will perform the *Dance of the Black Iguana or Garrobo*.

San Manuel de Colohete

This village is 10 miles (16 km) from La Campa on a well-maintained dirt road. Here you will find one of the best-preserved and loveliest churches in the region, which was also recently restored. Built in the 1600s the **Iglesia San Manuel** features a sculptured façade graced with life-size statues of saints. Inside the church, the painted ceilings and gold-covered altar have been well preserved throughout the centuries. From San Manuel it is also possible to hike the Celaque Mountain. Just find your way up to El Cedro, a small hamlet on the hillside and ask about guides. You can either hike up to the peak and down to Gracias, or follow trails that lead to the southwestern side of the mountain and Belen Gualcho.

San Sebastián

Another charming village and church, San Sebastián is about an hour's drive beyond San Manuel at an altitude of 5,805 feet (1,550 m). The church has imposing square bell towers on the outside and beautiful religious paintings on the inside. Inhabitants of this town produce leather goods and are coffee farmers.

Erandique

The turn-off to Erandique is in San Juan, which is about an hour's drive from Gracias on the road to La Esperanza. This picturesque town boasts three lovely churches, all built in distinct styles and all on their own little parks or squares. Erandique is also an opal-mining town and it's easy to buy different grades of opals on the street.

Belen Gualcho

A good day-trip from Santa Rosa de Copán, especially on a Sunday morning market day, is the two-hour drive to the town of Belen Gualcho, where the narrow streets of this mountain village flow down a hillside from the massive, uniquely styled Colonial church. On market days the cobbled streets overflow with Lenca from surrounding villages, a cultural tradition unchanged over the centuries. Buses leave from Santa Rosa de Copán three times a day to Belen Gualcho.

Nueva Ocotepeque

Nueva Ocotepeque is a typical, uninviting border town, and the last stop on the highway before the Guatemala and El Salvador borders. The town was founded in 1934 after the original village of Ocotepeque, was destroyed by flooding. Nueva Ocotepeque is basically a large bus terminal with little to offer as far as sites and attractions. The Bosque Montecristo Biological Reserves lies just southeast of town and the Cerro Montecristo, at the center of the reserve, is where the borders of three countries meet. However, entrance from the Honduras side is difficult, as the visitor's center and other facilities are in El Salvador. Approaching Nueva Ocotepeque you'll travel along Highway CA-4, which runs southwest from Santa Rosa de Copán through El Portillo, a small village in the Merendón Mountain Range and the Guisayote Mountain Biological Reserve. The reserve was established in an effort to save the mountaintop, as the lower region is completely deforested. The forestry office (Cohdefor) on the park in Nueva Ocotepeque provides maps of the reserve. El Portillo is on the highest stretch of paved road in the country at 6,594 feet (2,010 m) and offers some spectacular views of the surrounding countryside.

Getting There

To get to Nueva Ocotepeque take one of the many San José, Congolón, or Toritos/Copánecos buses that make the trip daily from the bus terminal in Santa Rosa de Copán.

Getting Around

1 Calle is the main street and the commercial center of Nueva Ocotepeque. The park, church, bus stations, and most of the hotels and eateries are within one block of the 1 Calle.

Where to Stay & Eat

Mini Hotel Turista, one block from central plaza, has varying accommodations up to $10 for a double room with private bath.

$ **Hotel Maya Chortí**, ☎ 653-3377, is by far one of the nicest hotels in town. Accommodations include private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Amenities include parking and a restaurant ($ **Don Chepe's**, open daily from 7 am to 10 pm).

$ **Hotel Sandoval**, ☎ 653-3098. Another good spot offering singles for less than $20 and doubles with private bath, hot water and a/c for $25. There is a hotel **restaurant** ($ open daily from 6 am to 9 pm) and parking.

Practicalities

● Banking & Money Exchange

The best rates for money exchange are obtained at the border crossing.

Banco de Occidente cashes traveler's checks into colons or quetzals, but not lempiras. Open weekdays from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, and Saturday from 8:30-11:30 am.

Banco Atlántida offers Visa cash advances. Open weekdays from 8 am to 3 pm and Saturday from 8-11 am.

● Government Services

The **police station**, ☎ 653-3199, is one block south and five blocks west of the main intersection. The **phone company**, **Hondutel**, is near the park and is open weekdays from 7 am to 9 pm. The **post office** is in front of the Hotel Sandoval and

is open weekdays from 8 am to 4:45 pm and Saturday from 8 am to noon.

Internet is available at **Cybermax World**, next to Hondutel, open daily from 9 am to 8 pm.

● Transportation

To El Salvador

The El Poy border crossing is about six miles (10 km) south of Nueva Ocotepeque and is open from 6 am to 6 pm. There are a few small eateries in El Poy, but no hotels. There is no charge to enter El Salvador.

San José Services, 1 Calle, offers shuttle buses (15 minutes) to the El Salvador border at El Poy every half-hour from 6 am to 10 pm. 50¢.

In El Salvador, buses travel (30 minutes) to La Palma and on to San Salvador (3½ hours) every 30 minutes until 4:30 pm.

To Guatemala

The Agua Caliente border crossing is about 11 miles (18 km) west of Nueva Ocotepeque and is open from 6 am to 6 pm.

San José offers bus service (30 minutes) to the Guatemalan border at Agua Caliente every half-hour from 6 am to 5 pm. 75¢.

In Guatemala, minibuses leave every 20 minutes for Esquipulas until 6 pm.

To Destinations in Honduras

San José, **Toritos/Copánecos** and **Congolón** all offer several buses a day to San Pedro Sula with stops in Santa Rosa de Copán and La Entrada for about $5. The last bus scheduled is Congolón at 3:30 pm. It's always a good idea to double-check bus schedules as they are often subject to change.

La Esperanza

Another stop on the Lenca Trail is the city of La Esperanza, the highest city in Honduras at 6,500 feet (1,980 m), and capital of the mostly Lenca department of Intibuca. Traditional Lenca dress is more evident here, consisting of bright-colored dresses and sweaters, and multi-colored scarves worn by the women. Outlying villages, such as Azacualpa, which are

spread out along the edge of a spectacular highland plain, offer an intimate and fascinating look into the simplicity of rural Lenca life. Temperatures that in the summer average 59°-66°F (15°-19°C) and in the winter can drop to as low as 41°F (5°C) have earned this town the reputation as the coldest place in Honduras. Don't forget to bring a jacket!

La Esperanza was originally two different villages: Intibuca, the older Lenca community, and La Esperanza, the newer ladino (mestizo) community. Today the distinction has blurred, as only a street separates the two with a central plaza in the middle. Both towns have their own Colonial church and a small grotto above the western end of town holds the shrine of the Virgin of Candelaria. Follow the main street from the park up the hill for a wonderful view of the town below.

Getting There

● From Gracias

While transportation is available to La Esperanza from Gracias, Lempira, which is only 50 miles (80 km/48 miles) away, the dirt road between the two is not always passable. Sometimes the road is in good condition and at other times, it is in a state of serious disrepair, usually during the rainy season. The trip can take anywhere from 2½ to five hours. But this mountain passage does provide some of the most spectacular views found in western Honduras and is well worth the adventure. The best way to travel this road is to rent a vehicle; your second option would be to catch the minivan that makes the trip once a day from Gracias.

● From Anywhere Else

There is a very good 42-mile (67-km) paved road to La Esperanza, from about two miles (three km) north of Siguatepeque (next to the Texaco Service Center), which is on the main highway between San Pedro Sula and Tegucigalpa. Buses leave from this junction hourly until around 2 pm. All you have to do is get to the junction.

Transportation

● From San Pedro Sula

Transportes Carolina, 2 Ave, 7 Calle, half a block from Catisa terminal in San Pedro Sula offers five buses a day Monday to Saturday from 4:30 am to 12:15 pm and on Sundays at 12:15 and 1:30 pm (3½ hours) for about $3. In La Esperanza, this company's terminal is in front of the Banco Atlántida, ☎ 783-0521. Five buses a day run to San Pedro Sula from 5:30 am to 2 pm.

● From Tegucigalpa

Transportes Carolina, one block north of Empresa El Rey in Tegucigalpa, offers five buses a day Monday to Saturday from 4:30 am to 12:15 pm and on Sundays at 12:15 and 1:30 pm (3½ hours) for about $3. In La Esperanza, this company's terminal is in front of the Banco Atlántida, ☎ 783-0521. Five buses a day run to Tegucigalpa from 5:30 am to 3:40 pm.

You can also catch any bus from San Pedro Sula to Tegucigalpa or vice-versa and ask to be dropped off at the junction north of Siguatepeque.

Sightseeing

Visit the churches, the grotto, and the **Casa de Cultura** or Cultural Center, which offers exhibits and information on the Lenca culture. The marketplace is also interesting and you'll find many examples of Lenca handicrafts on sale. On the weekends, the marketplace overflows, as vendors from the outlying villages arrive.

● Río Grande Waterfall, Intibuca

Just outside the town of Río Grande, which is about 12 miles (20 km) from La Esperanza, a spectacular waterfall almost 400 feet (120 m) falls into the valley below. To get there take the bus from La Esperanza to Río Grande at 10 am in front of Repuestos Arles, across the street from the market. The trip will take one hour.

● Laguna de Chiligatoro

A small and picturesque lagoon on the dirt road to San Francisco de Opalaca just outside of La Esperanza where you can both swim and fish.

Yamaranguila

Yamaranguila is a small Lenca community 4½ miles (seven km) from La Esperanza by way of a detour on the road to Gracias. You can either hike there or take one of the regular buses from La Esperanza. Yamaranguila has a Colonial church as well as a Lenca town hall and a nearby waterfall, La Chorrera. Ask anyone for directions to the footpath leading to the falls.

Practicalities

● Banking & Medical Facilities

Banco de Occidente, off the central plaza, cashes traveler's checks and has a Western Union office. Open weekdays from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm, Saturday from 8:30 am to 1:30 pm.

Clínica Médica is one block after the church. ☎ 783-0290. Open 24 hours.

● Government Services

The **police station** is next to the park, ☎ 783-1007, emergency 199. Open 24 hours. The **phone company (Hondutel**) is opposite the church on the central plaza and is open daily from 7 am to 9 pm. Next door is the **post office**, which is open weekdays from 8 am to noon and 2-5 pm, Saturday from 8-10 am.

● Internet

Solef Cyber Café is at the Yamaranguila exit, ☎ 783-0726, and offers a satellite Internet connection, international long distance calls via Internet, and photocopies. Open daily from 8 am to 8:30 pm.

Café Recreo, opposite the police station, in front of the park, ☎ 783-0598. Open daily from 8:30 am to 9 pm.

Annual Events

The city of La Esperanza celebrates its annual **Potato Festival** in August. Visitors can taste a variety of treats prepared with this vegetable, including wines and soups.

Where to Stay

Hotel Mejia Batres, two blocks north of the Central Plaza, ☎ 783-0051, offers 12 large rooms with private bath and hot water.

Hotel Ipsan Nah is 1½ blocks west of the Stadium, Barrio El Centro, ☎ 783-0570, 783-2079, 783-2086. There are nine rooms with private bath, hot water and cable TV. They offer a hotel restaurant, bar and parking.

$ **Hotel Mina**, 2½ blocks west of the Stadium, Barrio El Centro, ☎ 783-1071, has 20 large, clean rooms with private bath, hot water, and cable TV. There is a cafeteria and private parking.

$ **Gran Hotel la Esperanza**, ☎ 783-0068, offers 28 large rooms with private bath, hot water, fan and cable TV. Hotel restaurant and bar on the premises.

$$ **Hotel Cabañas Los Piños Mountain Resort** is 2½ miles (four km) on the road to Siguatepeque, ☎ 783-0743, 783-2034, www.lospinosresort.com, visit@lospinosresort.com. This truly unique mountain resort in the midst of the pine forest is an oasis of comfortable tranquility. This hotel is the artistic creation of Memo, an Iranian expat married to a Honduran. Every detail of every building is unique and built from natural stone and wood found in the region. Murals and sculptures are found throughout the hotel that, although colorful, blend with the natural environment. There are 31 rooms, each unique, with private bath, hot water and cable TV. There are also two luxury cabins with Jacuzzis and a fireplaces. Other features include two swimming pools, a children's interactive playground, restaurant and bar with international food as well as vegetarian platters.

$$ **Cabañas**, Bosque Del Llano de la Vírgen, ☎ 783-0443 in La Esperanza, or ☎ 236-5973 in Tegucigalpa. Five cabins in a pine forest outside of La Esperanza are the perfect place for a weekend retreat. The cabins sleep five in two separate bedrooms with one bath, hot water, and a fully equipped kitchen

and TV. Each comes with an outside barbecue and hammock, as well as a communal area with a basketball court and a bonfire pit.

Where to Eat

$$ **Casa Montserrat Restaurant**, ☎ 783-1432, is in Barrio Santa Catrina, near the exit to Siguatepeque, and offers an international menu, a large garden, and a playground.

$ **Mike's Fast Food**, Yamaranguila Exit, ☎ 783-0520, offers fast food in an air-conditioned ambience with a children's play area.

$$ **Restaurante Opalaca's** offers international and typical Honduran platters with steak specialties, as well as buffet specials. They also sell souvenirs.

■ San Juan

The town of San Juan, which is halfway (an hour and a half) between from La Esperanza and Gracias, has organized a Sustainable Tourism Cooperative and offers tours and accommodations in and around their small village. A no-alcohol village, the town's population is very friendly and goes out of their way to provide the traveler with a rewarding visit. At 3,900 feet (1,200 m), the village is surrounded by coffee plantations and pine forests, and enjoys wonderful climate that can get cool in the evening. Be sure to bring a jacket or sweater with you. Although accommodations and meals are simple, the surrounding countryside is beautiful, and a visit to San Juan provides an opportunity to experience the real Honduras while being catered to by friendly folk!

Established in 2002, the cooperative worked hard to make areas tourism-ready, by clearing pathways, installing bridges, erecting signs in English and Spanish and cleaning the town. Tours are offered on foot, on horseback, and in four-wheel vehicles. They include cloud forests (Opalaca Biological Reserve), waterfalls, canyons, a coffee farm, sugar cane farm, local artisans, and hot springs. None will disappoint you.

Tours ($15) are limited to four people and the cost goes down with each additional person. Accommodations are arranged

in the homes of the town folk, costing about $2.50 per night with a shared bath. The town has capacity for about 40 people. **Comedor Paty**, **Comedor Yamileth**, and **Comedor Angela** provide meals for about $1.50.

Getting There

Take the bus from either La Esperanza or Gracias and asked to be dropped off at *La Casa de Gladys Nolasco*, a shop run by Gladys that houses the San Juan Visitors Center, and where information on accommodations and tours is available in English and Spanish.

■ Lake Yojoa

Just a 90-minute drive from San Pedro Sula lies Lake Yojoa. This is the only natural lake in Honduras and is nestled between the Cerro Azul Meambar and Santa Bárbara mountains at an altitude of 2,200 feet (671 m). The area teems with bird life. The lake and the mountains are all protected areas and together they cover an area of 169 square miles (437 sq km). Tropical, pine, and cloud forests protect rivers, streams, and waterfalls running into this beautiful lake; they produce up to 100 inches (2,540 mm) of rainfall a year and it rains nearly every day. Nearby are the Francisco Morazán Reservoir and hydroelectric plant.

Over 400 types of migratory and resident birds and more than 800 species of plants have been observed in this region. It is also home to Baird's tapirs, jaguars, spider monkeys, howler monkeys, and anteaters (northern tamandua).

Water sports, waterfalls, horseback riding, hiking in national parks, cave exploration, and Lenca ruins all await you here.

LAKE YOJOA ENVIRONMENTAL FACTS

- 407 bird species have been identified in the Lake Yojoa region, representing 55% of the total number identified in the country.
- 66 species of aquatic birds have been spotted in the lake.

- The three types of resident ducks in Honduras and the seven species of migratory ducks make this their home. It is the only place in the country where the least bittern, the osprey and the crab hawk fish are found.
- All the kingfishers reported for Honduras live here as well.

History

The ruins of pre-Columbian temples found in the Lake Yojoa region are some of the oldest in Honduras, indicating that the area was inhabited as early as 1000 BC, probably by Lenca Indians. At one point, several thousand people resided along the shores of Lake Yojoa. Evidence which has been uncovered from the Olmec culture, similar to that found in the nearby Sula Valley, indicates that the entire region, from the valley to the lake, was once inhabited by the same people or tribe.

Getting There & Getting Around

Just 98 miles (158 km) northwest of Tegucigalpa and 52 miles (84 km) south of San Pedro Sula, Lake Yojoa is easily accessible from either city via the CA-5 highway, which runs along the eastern shore.

Road to Peña Blanca

Most of the nicer hotels are on the paved road to Peña Blanca that runs along the northeast shore from CA5. Peña Blanca, a rather rundown small town and the area's commercial center, is about two miles (three km) from the northern tip of the lake. From Peña Blanca, buses run to the mining town of El Mochito, the Pulhapanzak Waterfall and north to San Pedro Sula, and Los Naranjos Eco-archaeological Park.

By Bus

Take any bus between Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula and ask to be dropped off at La Guama, which is a small junction between the highway and a dirt road leading east to the Cerro Azul Meambar Park.

Lake Yojoa

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There's a small store (*pulpería*) and numerous stands selling such tropical fruit as pineapples, oranges, plantains, coconuts, bananas, and sugarcane at La Guama. During the daytime there are usually quite a few people standing by the roadside waiting for buses. Most of the hotels are on the road to Peña Blanca. Wait for a bus to Peña Blanca (25-minute trip) that runs every 30 minutes and which costs about 50¢. The last bus from Guama to Peña Blanca (a 25-minute trip) leaves at 4:30 pm. Don't forget to tell the driver to drop you off at your hotel. Most people won't be going there and it might not stop otherwise. You could also make prior arrangements for your hotel to pick you up in La Guama.

By Car

From San Pedro Sula drive to the Peña Blanca turn-off (about an hour) that is on the right-hand side of the road. You will see a large sign. The turn-off from the north is almost a complete U-turn onto the road to Peña Blanca. The ride or drive from San Pedro is a nice one through the Sula Valley, which takes you up into rolling hills of pine forests interspersed with pineapple fields. Many roadside stands will sell you fresh pineapple in season.

Do the same if you're traveling from Tegucigalpa (2½ hours) or somewhere else south of the lake. The turn-off is a fork on the left side off the highway after you've passed most of the lake to your left. The lakeshore south of the turn-off is lined with small, wooden, open-air eateries perched over the lake, which are famous for serving up fresh fried-fish platters.

Practicalities (Peña Blanca)

The national **phone company** (**Hondutel**) is inside the Cafeteria y Repostería Candy, and is open daily from 7 am to noon and 1-6 pm. The **police station** is across the street from the Hotel Maranta and is open 24 hours. The **Centro Medico Santa Cecilia**, ☎ 650-0010, is open 24 hours, and also has a pharmacy.

MICRO BREWERY

For a unique experience in the lake region, visit the only micro brewery in Honduras, the **D&D Micro Brewery**, run by master brewer Robert Dale. Dale, a native of Oregon, opened the brewery about five years ago and also runs a small B&B set amidst lush vegetation near the lake. Try some of Bob's Lenca Gold Pale Ale, the Heart of the Lake Amber Ale, the Obsidian of Yojoa Porter or the Apricot, Mango or Raspberry flavored ales for about $1.20; or enjoy a cup of homegrown coffee and fresh banana bread. Bob also offers boat tours on the lake. To get to Bob's place, take a taxi from Peña Blanca towards Mochito for Lps. 5. Keep an eye out for the D&D Brewery sign after the football field on your right. ☎ 994-9719, dndbrew@yahoo.com.

Adventures on Water

Boating and fishing tours are available in all the larger hotels for about $25-$30 an hour. Not all provide fishing gear, so if you are an avid fisher, it's a good idea to bring your own. Black bass, which was introduced in 1954-55 by Tela Railroad Company executives, and eventually produced record-breaking catches, had been over-fished by the late 1970s. Fortunately, two decades of conservation efforts has allowed the species to make a slow comeback.

Hotel Agua Azul, road to Peña Blanca, ☎ 991-7244, offers guided boat, fishing, and horseback riding tours, They also rent rowboats.

Hotel Brisas del Lago, road to Peña Blanca, ☎ 557-8197, conducts guided boat (catamaran) and fishing tours.

Hotel Finca Las Glorias, road to Peña Blanca, ☎ 566-0461, has guided boat and fishing tours and rents rowboats or aquatic bicycles by the hour. They also provide a tour of their coffee finca and horseback tours to Los Naranjos.

Honduyate Marina, highway two miles south of Peña Blanca detour (white cement 162 km marker), ☎ 990-9387,

offers sailboats, fishing boats, wave runner rentals as well as skiing with all equipment included. Tours of the lake are also available in one of the old ferries that used to cross the lake.

Eco-Adventures

Bird-Watching Paradise

Lake Yojoa encompasses an area of approximately 14,000 acres and has an average depth of 50 feet (15 m). Low marshland attracts a great many aquatic birds, including tiger herons, wood storks, ducks, and a variety of hummingbirds on nearby shores. Higher altitudes in the nearby parks provide glimpses of other species, such as pigeons, parrots, motmots, trogons, wrens, and keel-billed toucans, among many others. The best places to bird-watch are the western shore (arrange for a boat), Los Naranjos Eco-Archaeological Park, and the Cerro Azul Meambar National Park. The wooded area around the Hotel Agua Azul and the small island, *Isla del Venado*, off the hotel's shore are also good spots.

The serious bird-watcher might consider arranging a tour with an experienced guide. Roberto Gallardo, of the **Enchanted Wings Butterfly House and Nature Center**, in Copán Ruinas, is one of the most highly recommended birding guides available in Honduras. You can call Roberto in Copán Ruinas, ☎ 651-4133, or write to rgallardo32@hotmail.com.

Cerro Azul Meambar National Park

This pristine park, covered in dense foliage, forms part of the Lake Yojoa eco-region with an area of about 12 square miles (50 sq km) and heights of up to 6,715 feet (2,047 m). The park's pine-clad slopes lead to the high mountain cloud forest as well as to several beautiful waterfalls. Four well-designed trails that lead to lookout points or waterfalls, with the option of starting on one trail and then moving to another, experiencing different views of the lake from different heights. The trails vary in length and difficulty from half a mile (about one km) to four miles (6½ km) and take from 30 minutes to nine hours to cover. The park is home to such elusive creatures as pumas

and jaguars, but it is more likely you will spot a monkey or a squirrel.

To get to the park take the dirt road that runs east for about three miles (five km) from La Guama to Santa Elena. Any car can travel this stretch of the journey. You can also take the bus from La Guama that travels back and forth to the park on an hourly basis and costs about 50¢. From Santa Elena, a one-mile (1½-km) path leads to Los Pinos, the park's visitor's center, which provides information on hiking and hiring guides. A four-wheel-drive vehicle is necessary to get to the visitor's center or you can walk. Admission to the park is $5, and it's open daily from 8 am to 4 pm. Cabins with bunks for six people and bath are available for $5. Food service for groups must be arranged in advance as the kitchen is not always open. Meals cost $2-$5. The park is managed by a private organization, Proyectos Aldeas Globales-PAG or Project Global Village, www.paghonduras.org, pagcent@paghonduras.org, based in Siguatepeque at 3 Calle, 1–2 Ave NO, ☎ 773-2027, 733-2029, and with an office in Tegucigalpa, ☎ 239-9287.

PAG also manages **La Naturaleza Tourism Center**, ☎ 990-6021, in front of Lake Yojoa (look for the 160 km cement mile marker), the primary function of which is creating consciousness of the national park through education. The center has a convention center, Natural History Museum, buffet-restaurant, children's games and a gift shop.

Montaña Santa Bárbara

The Santa Bárbara Mountain National Park provides a dramatic backdrop to the lake's western shore and is the second-highest peak in Honduras at 9,000 feet (2,743 m). Unfortunately, the park does not have any tourist facilities on the lake side. Inquire at the hotels for a guided tour.

Cuevas de Taulabé National Monument

The Cuevas de Taulabé are just 12½ miles (20 km) south of the lake on the highway to Tegucigalpa. Lighting and stairs run through the first quarter-mile (½ km) of a spectacular limestone cave system. About 7½ miles (12 km) of the caves, which were discovered in 1969 during road building, have been penetrated and the end has not yet been found. Be sure

to wear sturdy shoes, as some parts of the path can be slippery and watch out for hanging stalactites and bats. It's also a good idea to bring a flashlight. Admission is $1. To get to the caves take any bus from La Guama heading south and asked to be dropped off.

Pulhapanzak Waterfall

A visit to this stunning waterfall will be a highlight of your visit to the Lake Yojoa region. The spectacular cascade on the Río Lindo falls 141 feet (43 m) amidst lush vegetation. A slippery and narrow path descends to the riverbank below the falls where local youngsters dive from cliffs into the falls. Descend the path carefully for the best view of the falls. The same teens will guide you to a cave behind the falls and show you where to safely dive into the falls for about $5. Farther downstream a cement stairway leads to the river, providing another great view, but not quite as close-up. Installations include swimming holes, public bathrooms, and a small restaurant serving meals for between $2 and $3. Next to the entrance and restaurant there are some easily identifiable mounds of unexcavated ruins believed to be a religious ceremonial plaza. Open daily 8 am to 6 pm. Admission is $1.50 and an additional $1.50 for camping. Bring your own gear. It's best to visit the falls on a weekday as the park tends to get very crowded on the weekends.

To get to Pulhapanzak take the bus from Peña Blanca to El Mochito and get off in the village of San Buenaventura, which is five miles (eight km) north of Peña Blanca. The trip takes about half an hour from Peña Blanca, but can take up to two hours from La Guama. Pulhapanzak is just short of a mile (1.3 km) from San Buenaventura. Buses leave from San Buenaventura to San Pedro Sula and Peña Blanca about every hour during the day.

Los Naranjos Eco-Archaeological Park

This park is on the edges of the north shore of Lake Yojoa. Nearly four miles (six km) of nature paths with wooden bridges and bird-watching platforms wind through the 35-acre park. A small museum provides interesting details concerning the site and the people who once lived there. The park also contains the remains of a pre-Columbian settlement

set amidst lush vegetation and wetlands. Most of the mounds are not restored as the ruins consist of clay and stone and are susceptible to rapid deterioration when excavated. The turn-off to the park is just before Peña Blanca. The two-mile road to the park leads to the small village of El Jaral, where the park entrance is located. Mini-buses run from Peña Blanca to El Jaral hourly. Admission is $5.

Where to Stay

Northeast Shore

Take the bus from La Guama to Peña Blanca and ask to be dropped off near the hotel of your choice. Take the road to Peña Blanca if you are driving.

$ **Hotel Agua Azul**, ☎ 991-7244, Sierra Santa Cruz de Yojoa, about a mile (1.6 km) from the highway. This hotel is in a lovely wooded setting that slopes down to the waterfront and boat facilities. Accommodations are somewhat rundown cabaña-type rooms with one or two bedrooms, private bath, hot water, a/c, and fan. The hotel's best feature is the huge open-air deck restaurant overlooking the lake. This is a great place to do a little bird-watching. Other amenities include pool, boat rentals, and horseback riding.

$$ **Las Brisas del Lago**, ☎ 992 2937, about three miles (five km) from highway. Brisas del Lago is the largest of the three resorts in this area. Clean and comfortable rooms have balconies with lake views, a/c, private bath, and hot water. Laundry service is also available. There is a large swimming pool, restaurant and water sports, including a catamaran.

$$ **Hotel Finca Las Glorias**, ☎ 566-0461, www.hotellasglorias.com, about 3½ miles from the highway (six km). This pleasant hotel is on the lakeshore of a working coffee and orange farm with great views. Accommodations include nicely furnished, comfortable rooms with dou-

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.	
	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

ble beds, a/c, private bath, hot water, and cable TV. Laundry service is also available. They have a restaurant, bar, billiards, swimming pool, volleyball and play area for children. No charge for children under 12 years of age with their families.

West Shore

D&D Bed & Breakfast and Micro Brewery, ☎ 994-9719, dndbrew@yahoo.com. This unique hotel with its own brewery set in lush surroundings offers budget accommodations that include two-bed rooms fitted with shower, sink, toilet, and fan. This is one of the few places in Honduras where the tap water is purified and you can drink it. Meals range from Lps. 20-100 ($1 to $5) and include tasty fresh fish platters. To get to Bob's place, take a taxi from Peña Blanca toward Mochito for Lps. 5 (25¢). Keep an eye out for the D & D Brewery sign after the football field on your right.

Gualiqueme is a lakeside cottage on the west side of Lake Yojoa and accessible only by boat. The cottage belongs to Honduyate Marina, which is on the highway about two miles south of the Peña Blanca detour (at the 162 km white cement marker), ☎ 990-9387, www.honduyatemarina.net. There is a kitchen with stove and cutlery, outside BBQ (bring charcoal), fireplace, four bedrooms with eight single beds. $150 for entire cabin.

Southeast Shore

$$-$$$ **Honduyate Marina**, highway about two miles south of Peña Blanca detour (at 162 km white cement marker), ☎ 990-9387, www.honduyatemarina.net, offers six comfortable rooms with double beds and private bath, hot water and fan; some with a/c. Breakfast included.

$ **Los Remos Hotel**, ☎ 552-0618, is a very old lakeside hotel and somewhat rundown. There are 19 rooms with private bath, hot water and fan. Laundry service is also available. Amenities include restaurant, bar, and pool.

Where to Eat

Small eateries along the highway and lining the southeast shore of the lake serve up the area's trademark fried bass meals. Price usually depends on the size of the fish and can vary from $3 to $10. Bottled beer and sodas are usually available.

Unless you've become a native and have grown used to the homegrown amoebas, you should probably skip the pickled salads and hot peppers offered in mayonnaise jars with every meal.

$-$$ **Chalet del Lago**, Honduyate Marina, offers a complete menu including fish, beef and chicken entrées as well as burgers and sandwiches. Full bar service.

$-$$ **Finca de las Glorias Restaurant** offers an international menu and serves generous portions of typical Honduran food and fried fish. They also have a Sunday meat and seafood buffet. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

$-$$ **Hotel Agua Azul** has an international menu and full bar service from their great deck over the lake. This is a nice place for a relaxing meal and a quiet walk. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

La Naturaleza Tourism Center, main highway, offers a buffet with a choice of vegetables, salads, soups, an array of meats, and the famous and always fresh fish from Lake Yojoa, priced at $2-$5.

DINING PRICE CHART	
Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.	
$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

Where to Stay & Eat in Peña Blanca

Peña Blanca offers cheaper options for both lodging and meals and is a good base for your lake visit. There are two restaurants, **La Roca & Las Tejas** and **Selectos Reposteria**, and several *comedores* that serve typical Honduran fare for less than $5.

Hotel La Finca, ☎ 898-8178, has well maintained and clean singles, doubles, and triples with private bath, hot water and TV.

Hotel Maranta has airy rooms with private bath, fan, and TV. This hotel is across the street from the bus stop and can get noisy.

■ Santa Bárbara

Santa Bárbara, which is also the capital of the department of Santa Bárbara, is an old Colonial city at the foot of the majestic Santa Bárbara Mountain. Although the town does not have much as far as major attractions go, the traveler is allowed the opportunity to experience typical village life and local culture, renowned artisanship, and a breathtaking natural environment.

The department of Santa Bárbara is just north of Lake Yojoa and southwest of San Pedro Sula. It has the typical mountain terrain of the western highlands and the rivers Ulúa, Cececapa, Hondo, and Chiquito flowing through it. Climatic conditions in the region are ideal for growing coffee, which is the major economic activity. The Santa Bárbara National Park is comprised of cloud forest, subtropical wet forest, and highland pine forests in an area of 47.3 square miles (123 sq km) and is one of the country's least explored national parks due to lack of infrastructure.

A Cultural Tradition

Another major activity that is not quite as profitable as coffee growing is the production of handicrafts, which are sold all over Honduras and are slowly being introduced on the international market. Using locally available raw materials such as cornhusk, red clay, palm leaves, and reeds called *tule* and

junco, artisans in Santa Bárbara make pottery, hats, baskets, mats, purses, ornamental flowers, dolls and other products. The artisans are primarily women who follow the unique, local traditions of their villages.

In the villages of Santa Bárbara and the nearby municipality of Ceguaca, artisans make hats and other products with *junco* reed. Artisans in the village of Macholoa produce pottery. In the municipalities of El Nispero and Ceguaca *petates*, or reed mats, are woven. In Nuevo Celilac, artisans create ornamental products from corn husks; while in Arada, women make colorful coiled baskets from *junco*.

The ***Empresa Comunitaria Yahamala*** has a store in the city of Santa Bárbara where all types of local artisan goods are sold. This cooperative also exports the products to outlets around the country and to the United States. Their products are also included in the Aid to Artisans product catalog; see www.aidtoartisans.org.

While the Santa Bárbara artisans are organized and their products are starting to enter an international market, they are still mostly poor women who produce goods to supplement their family income. For example, a woman may spend a week making a single reed mat, which is then sold locally for a price of $2. In order to promote the Santa Bárbara artisan tradition and support these women, tours have been organized to artisan villages so visitors can learn about the production process, learn about the artisans and buy artisan products at fair prices. For more information, e-mail the Tourism Information Center in the city of Santa Bárbara at santabarbara_turismo@yahoo.com, or call ☎ 643-2904.

Getting There

By Car

From Tegucigalpa or Southern Honduras

A completely paved road from Pitosolo – a small town on the southern tip of Lake Yojoa – runs about 28 miles (45 km) northwest to Santa Bárbara from the highway between Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula.

From San Pedro Sula

Take the western highway toward Santa Rosa de Copán and turn left at the detour in Ceibita, which is 22 miles (35 km) from San Pedro Sula. Follow the road another 37 miles (60 km) to Santa Bárbara.

By Bus

To & From San Pedro Sula

Two companies offer daily bus service to and from San Pedro Sula.

Terminal Cotisba, ☎ 643-2387/08, central plaza in Santa Bárbara, runs daily buses to San Pedro Sula (two hours) every half-hour from 4 am to 5 pm. Their terminal in San Pedro Sula is located at 4 Ave SO, 9/10 Calle, ☎ 552-8889, and offers daily bus service to Santa Bárbara every half-hour from 5:30 am to 6 pm. Tickets cost $1.30. They offer direct service at 8 am and 4 pm.

Transan runs daily buses to San Pedro Sula (two hours) every half-hour from 5:30 am to 5:30 pm and from San Pedro Sula to Santa Bárbara every half-hour from 7 am to 5:30 pm. Tickets cost $2.

To & from Santa Rosa de Copán/La Entrada

As the bus to and from Santa Bárbara takes the western highway, it is possible to get off the bus to San Pedro Sula at the junction in Ceibita and catch a connecting bus to La Entrada en route to Copán Ruinas. In other words, three buses are required for the trip: one from Santa Bárbara to Ceibita, a second from Ceibita to La Entrada and the last one from La Entrada to Copán Ruinas. A long journey to be sure, but a definite budget option.

The same route can be used to reach Santa Rosa de Copán on just two buses. Take one bus from Santa Bárbara to Ceibita, and another from Ceibita to Rosa de Copán.

To & from Tegucigalpa/Siguatepeque

Junqueños, 1½ blocks northeast of central plaza, ☎ 643-2124, runs buses from Monday through Saturday to Tegucigalpa (four hours) at 7 am and 2 pm, and from Tegucigalpa to Santa Bárbara at 7 am and 2 pm, or on Sunday at 8:30 am and 2 pm. $5.

You can also catch the Tegucigalpa bus on its way to Santa Bárbara in Siguatepeque and, vice-versa, take the bus to Tegucigalpa and get off at Siguatepeque.

Practicalities

Banking

Banco Atlántida, one block down the main street to the left of the church, cashes traveler's checks and gives advances on Visa. Open weekdays from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm and Saturday from 8:30-11:30 am.

The **police station**, ☎ 643-2120, is a 20-minute walk down the hill from the northwest corner of the park and is open 24 hours. The **hospital** is just before the police station and is open 24 hours. The **phone company**, **Hondutel**, is just behind the post office. Open daily from 7 am to 9 pm. The **post office** is on the street directly in front of the church, one block to the right. Open weekdays 8 am to noon and 2 pm-5 pm and Saturday 8-10 am.

Laundry

Lavandería Zaire is two blocks east of the southeast corner of plaza.

Internet

Cyberplant, three blocks north of the park, open weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm and Saturday from 8 am to noon; and **Servicopins**, one block east on the south side of the church, ☎ 643-3012, open weekdays from 8 am to 5 pm and Saturday from 8 am to noon.

Tours & Information

The **Tourism Information Center**, ☎ 643-2904, santabarbara_turismo@yahoo.com, is one block south, then one block east from the southeast corner of the Central Plaza in Casa Bográn. It provides traveler information, including maps and recommendations about hotels, restaurants and tours. You can also arrange tours to Santa Bárbara's different attractions. The center has a small historical and cultural interpretative center and offers local handicrafts for sale.

Annual Events

Patron Saint Festival (Saint Bárbara), celebrated annually December 1-12.

Tourist and Cultural Festival, held in the latter half of May, features dance and musical performances by local and national groups, food and artisan product sales in the Central Plaza and various cultural expositions.

Shopping

Artesanías Yahamala, south of the park, ☎ 643-2905, is the Artisan Cooperative store that sells handicrafts from many different villages.

Sightseeing

Much of the architecture in and around Santa Bárbara dates back to the Spanish Colonial era. The Catholic Church in Santa Bárbara was built in 1887 and features an intricately carved wooden altar with painted statues of several saints.

Another worthwhile visit is to the Catholic Church in the village of **Macholoa**. The church dates back to approximately 1537 and is one of the oldest in Honduras.

A hike up into the hills behind Santa Bárbara takes you to the ruins of the **Castillo Bográn**, the country home of Luis Bográn, president of Honduras in the 1880s. From the castle, there is an excellent view of the city of Santa Bárbara and the surrounding area. President Bográn's restored home in town now houses the information center.

Coffee *finca* (farm), scenic banana, and sugarcane plantations excursions as well as visits to processing plants can all be arranged by Tourist Information Center in the Casa Bográn.

Eco-Adventures

The **Montaña Santa Bárbara**, the second-highest peak in Honduras at 9,000 feet (2,743 m), is the only high-altitude limestone mountain in Central America – a massive formation of limestone, characterized by a mysterious network of

underground caves, tunnels and sinkholes. The park is bordered by Lake Yojoa to the east, which is in turn bordered by the Cerro Azul Meambar National Park. The lake and the two national parks together compose one of the most biologically diverse regions in Honduras, featuring 17 individual ecosystems that support a very wide array of wildlife and endemic plant species. The park is just 20 minutes from Santa Bárbara. But there is little infrastructure to support solo hikes and it is highly recommended that you arrange a guided tour. Inquire at the Tourist Information Center in the Casa Bográn.

Adventures on Water

Some of the most popular attractions in Santa Bárbara are the area's man-made swimming holes or *balnearios*, which are private parks with swimming pools and other amenities such as restaurants and playing fields. The pools in the *balnearios* are continuously fed by rivers through aqueducts or pumping systems and are chemically treated to provide for a clean and natural swimming environment. On weekends and holiday occasions, the *balnearios* in Santa Bárbara are full of people from all over the region.

Turicentro Bella Vista, a little over four miles (seven km) south of the city on the main highway, has a restaurant/bar, soccer field, and dance floor. Admission is $3 for adults and $1 for children. Open weekends from 8 am to 5 pm.

Tencoa, three miles (five km) south of the city on the the main highway, ☎ 643-2561, has a restaurant/bar, soccer field, dance floor and playground for children. Admission is $2 for adults and $1 for children. Open weekends from 8 am to 5 pm.

Santa Lucia, 7½ miles (12 km) north of the city on the main highway, ☎ 965-852, with restaurant/bar, dance floor, and hot springs. Admission is free. Open daily from 9 am to 7 pm.

Río Hondo, three miles (five km) north of the city on the main highway at the turn-off for Montaña S.B., ☎ 643-2206, with restaurant/bar, soccer field, hiking and horseback riding. Admission is $2 for adults and $1 for children. Open weekends from 8 am to 5 pm.

Parque Aqúatico Santa Bárbara, 2½ miles (four km) south of the city on the main highway. Admission is $2 for adults and $1 for children. Open weekends from 8 am to 5 pm.

La Torre, Barrio El Farolito, ☎ 643-2440, with restaurant/bar, soccer field, dance floor and conference facilities. Admission is $2 for adults and $1 for children. Open weekends from 8 am to 5 pm.

Where to Stay

$ **Gran Hotel Colonial**, 1½ blocks east from the southeast corner of the central plaza, ☎ 643-2665. They have 50 large rooms with private bath, hot water, fan, a/c and cable TV. Amenities include hotel restaurant, swimming pool, parking and access to Recreational Park Bella Vista.

$ **Boarding House Modern**, one block southeast of the central plaza, ☎ 643-2203. There are 23 spacious rooms with private bath, hot water, fan, a/c and cable TV.

Hotel Ruth is next door to Hotel Ejecutivo, about 1½ blocks to the left of the church, ☎ 643-2632. There are 13 rooms with private bath, hot water, fan, a/c and cable TV.

Hotel Ejecutivo is 1½ blocks to the left of the church, ☎ 643-2206. This pretty, new hotel offers accommodations that include 30 clean rooms of different sizes with private bath, hot water, fan, a/c and cable TV. There is a hotel restaurant and bar.

Hotel Santa Lucia, two blocks north of the square, ☎ 643-2531, offers 24 rooms with private bath, fan, and cable TV.

Where to Eat

$ **Repostería Charles**, ☎ 643-2433. Offers typical Honduran food, grilled chicken, grilled beef, enchiladas, tacos, pupusas, and sandwiches, as well as smoothies and a full bakery in an air-conditioned environment. Open from 9 am to 9 pm.

$-$$ **El Brasero Pollo Campeño**, half a block north of The centRal plaza, ☎ 643-2616. Serves good fried chicken, hamburgers, and seafood. Open 9 am to 10 pm. Karaoke nights on Thursday and Saturday.

$ **Kobs Ice Cream**, Central Plaza, ☎ 997-5708. Ice cream parlor offering a variety of ice-cream flavors, desserts and soft drinks. Open weekdays from 9 am to 9pm, and Saturday from 9 am to 9:30 pm.

$ **Heladería Arco Iris de Sabores**, southeast of the park, ☎ 643-2348. Ice cream shop offering different flavors of ice cream, pastries, gourmet coffee, fruit juices, smoothies and snacks.

$ **Rincon Colonial La Casué Meals**. This restaurant serves typical Honduran food and offers a buffet lunch and salad bar. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 7 pm and Sunday from 8 am to 1 pm.

$ **Cafetería Colonial**, ☎ 643-2812. Offers typical Honduran platters for under $2. Open 7 am to 10 pm.

$ **Mesón Casa Blanca**, ☎ 643-2839. Serves typical Honduran platters and offers a buffet lunch. Open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner from 7 am to 8:30 pm.

$-$$ **Delivery Pizza** is 3½ blocks from the northeast corner of the park, ☎ 643-2903. Air-conditioned pizza parlor serving pizza, garlic bread, and chicken wings. Open 3-10 pm.

$ **El Patio**, ☎ 643-2916. Serves typical Honduran food, fish, fried chicken, grilled beef. Open from 7 am to midnight for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Full-service bar.

Central Honduras

The interior highlands of Honduras feature rugged, mostly pine-clad, mountains of moderate height. They are interspersed with upland valleys, which provide enough vegetation to support livestock and limited agriculture. These highlands have been favored sites for human settlement over thousands of years. Villages and towns, including the capital, Tegucigalpa, are tucked in the larger valleys and Spanish-speaking people of Indian-Spanish heritage comprise the bulk of the population. This region has a rich native and Colonial heritage.

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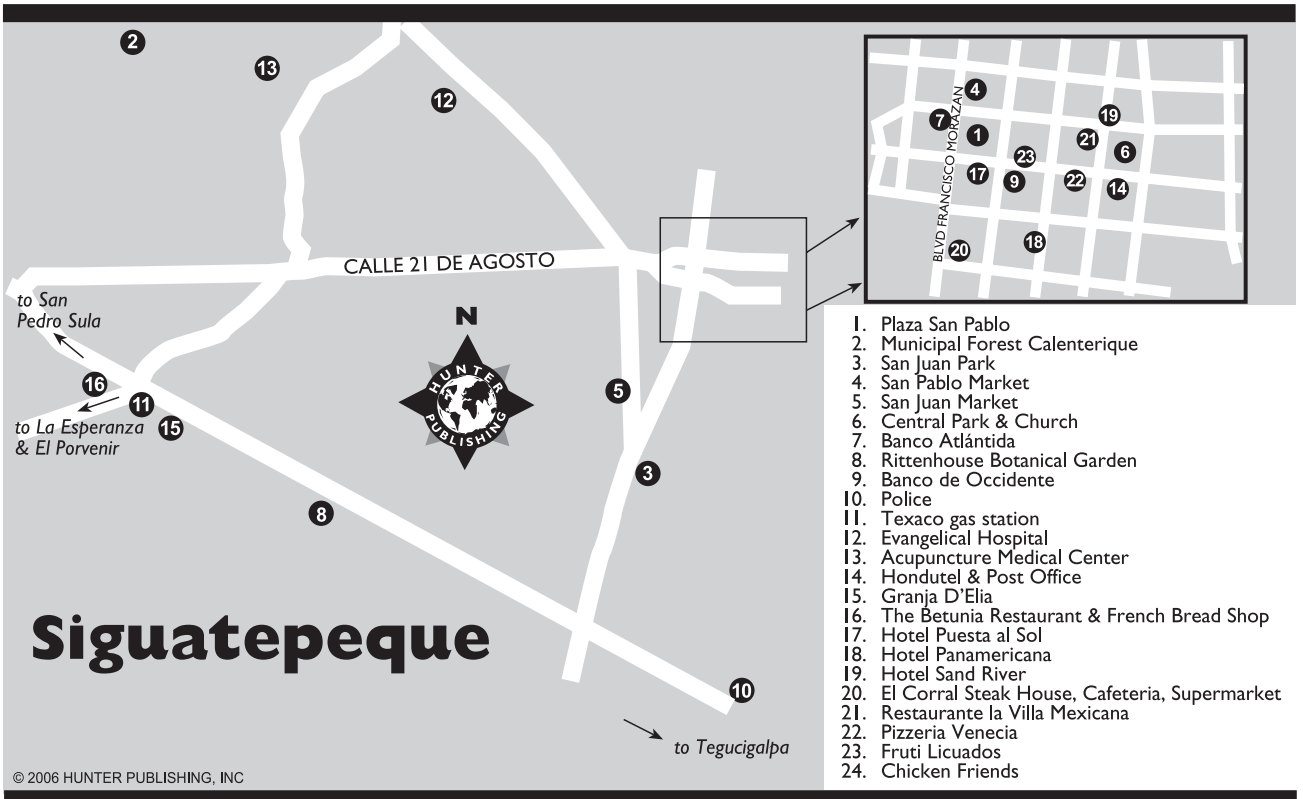
■ Siguatepeque

Siguatepeque is a large town (75,000 population) midway between the capital of Tegucigalpa (73 miles/117 km) and the large industrial city of San Pedro Sula (78 miles/125 km). It's a favorite rest stop for traveler's between the two cities. At an altitude of 3,600 feet (1,100 m), the small valley surrounded by forest-clad mountains provides a cool respite for the travel-weary. The roadside is full of buffet-style restaurants catering to the thousands that pass daily on their way to the larger cities. An abundance of fruits and vegetables grown in the continuous spring-like weather are also readily available, as is Lenca pottery from the nearby community of El Porvenir. The National School of Forestry Sciences (Esnacifor) is here in addition to several medical facilities that take advantage of the town's central location.

The town was founded in 1689 and attained the status of a municipality in 1861 with the name San José de Siguatepeque. In 1926, the town was officially designated a city and named Siguatepeque, which in the Mexican Nahuatl dialect means "the hill of women."

There is not much to do here. The town is in a rural region dedicated mainly to farm and forest enterprises. Siguatepeque, unlike most Honduran villages, has two down-



1. Plaza San Pablo
2. Municipal Forest Calenterique
3. San Juan Park
4. San Pablo Market
5. San Juan Market
6. Central Park & Church
7. Banco Atlántida
8. Rittenhouse Botanical Garden
9. Banco de Occidente
10. Police
11. Texaco gas station
12. Evangelical Hospital
13. Acupuncture Medical Center
14. Hondutel & Post Office
15. Granja D'Elia
16. The Betunia Restaurant & French Bread Shop
17. Hotel Puesta al Sol
18. Hotel Panamericana
19. Hotel Sand River
20. El Corral Steak House, Cafeteria, Supermarket
21. Restaurante la Villa Mexicana
22. Pizzeria Venecia
23. Fruti Licuados
24. Chicken Friends

town parks. From the highway, the first is Plaza San Pablo, which is on the right-hand side. The Central Plaza is three blocks east of Plaza San Pablo.

Getting There & Getting Around

Any bus going to either Tegucigalpa or San Pedro Sula – with the exception of the luxury liners – will invariably stop in Siguatepeque for either breakfast, lunch, or just for a short rest stop. Direct service between Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula is offered by Hedman Alas, Empresa Saenz, and Empresa El Rey. Buses between Tegucigalpa and El Progreso, Tela, Santa Rosa de Copán, La Esperanza, La Ceiba, Trujillo or any other town beyond Siguatepeque to the west also pass through here.

Ask to be dropped at the bus station next to the pedestrian bridge on the highway. The town of Siguatepeque is a mile (1½ km) north from the highway. A taxi into town costs about $1.

Direct Buses to/from Siguatepeque, Tegucigalpa & San Pedro Sula

The direct bus service to/from Tegucigalpa is **Empresas Unidas**, ☎ 773-0149, which is on the eastern side of the Plaza San Pablo. The direct service to/from San Pedro Sula is **Empresas Etul**, ☎ 773-2033, which is at the local bus terminal one block west of Plaza San Pablo. Other companies provide services to regional destinations from this bus terminal as well.

Practicalities

Banking

Banco de Occidente, on the southeast corner of Plaza San Pablo, has a Western Union and cashes traveler's checks. Open weekdays from 9 am to 4 pm and Saturday from 9 am to noon.

Banco Atlántida, on the northwest corner of Plaza San Pablo, cashes traveler's checks and makes cash advances on

Visa cards. Open weekdays from 9 am to 3 pm, and Saturday from 9 am to noon.

Medical Facilities & Drugstores

There are at least 10 pharmacies/drugstores scattered throughout this small town, with five in the immediate downtown area.

Hospital Evangelico, Barrio Calanterique, on the northern outskirts of town, ☎ 773-0179, 773-0170, has modern facilities and also serves as a teaching hospital. 24-hour emergency services are provided.

Hospital de Acupuntura, Barrio Macaruya, is a modern facility offering such services as acupuncture, dentistry, herbal medicines, sauna and massage.

Nelly Velasquez, ☎ 773-3341, offers professional therapeutic massages. The widely-renowned **Dr Waldemar** is a gifted herbalist who can be contacted at ☎ 773-2828.

Government Services

The **police station** is on the highway toward Tegucigalpa, ☎ 773-0042.

The **phone company (Hondutel)**, on Plaza Central is open daily from 7 am to 9 pm. The **post office** is right next door to the phone company.

Internet

Tecnomedia and **Plaza Net Cyber Café** are in front of the Plaza San Pablo.

Annual Events

The **National Pine Festival** is held during the last two weeks in April and includes a food festival, parade, sports events, beauty pageant, music, a marathon race, street dance, and carnival.

The **patron saint's festival** is celebrated the week of January 25 in honor of San Pablo.

Sightseeing

Granja D'Elia, ☎ 773-0414, 773-4458, is now offering eco-agricultural tours to nearby farms and horseback riding excursions.

Organic Farm

CEASO, El Socorro, Siguatepeque, contact René Santos Aguilar, ☎ 999-7007 for information in Spanish; or John Charter, ☎ 211-8161 for information in English. CEASO is a farming center dedicated to teaching and promoting organic agriculture. It is run by one family that hosts workshops and educational tours for farmers, students, or anyone interested in learning about sustainable/organic agriculture techniques. Visitor packages from one to five days are offered and include a variety of activities and tours of the farm, nearby forests, and even a farm tool museum, which includes the village history as told by a village elder. Accommodations include a modest and clean dormitory, a dining room, and a conference room.

Where to Stay

$ **Hotel Passaggio Turistico Granja D'Elia**, ☎ 773-0414, 773-4458, has 20 comfortable and clean double rooms with private bath and hot water at a price of about $25 for a double with fan and $35 for a double with a/c. They also have four cabins that accommodate 10 people each and cost about $5 per person. Granja D'Elia now offers hiking and horseback riding tours to nearby farms and mountain areas. They also have a small bus for areas farther afield such as the Cuevas de Taulabé and the Lake Yojoa region.

$ **Hotel Plaza San Pablo**, ☎ 773-0950, www.hotelplazasanpablo.com, hotelplazasanpablo@gmx.net. This modern hotel, with high ceilings, sun roofs, tiled floors, and Colonial arches, provides 32 rooms with private bath, hot water, phone, a/c, and cable TV. Amenities include a 24 hour cafeteria and free breakfast, parking, and 15 minutes per day of free Internet.

$ **Hotel Puesta al Sol**, 1 Ave, 2 y 3 Calle, Bo. El Centro, ☎ 773-4774, 773-3159, www.hotelpuestadelsol.net, info@hotelpuestadelsol.net. This modern three-story, spacious and airy hotel, provides 25 rooms with private bath, hot water, phone, a/c, and cable TV. There is laundry service, a cafeteria and free parking, coffee, breakfast, and 15 minutes of Internet.

Budget

Hotel Panamericana, Barrio El Centro, ☎ 773-0202, has 30 small rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Parking and a restaurant are included.

Hotel Sand River, Barrio El Centro in front of the Central Plaza, ☎ 773-3378, has 10 rooms with private bath, hot water, fan and TV.

Where to Eat

$$-$$$ **El Corral Steak House**, next to El Corral Supermarket, Barrio Abajo, offers the finest dining in Siguatepeque. The ample menu includes steak specialties as well as seafood and wines. Open from Tuesday to Sunday 11 am to 10 pm.

$ **Restaurante la Villa Mexicana**, in front of Municipal Place, serves typical Honduran and Mexican platters, such as nachos, burgers, tortas (sandwiches on a burger bun), and burritos. Open daily 7 am to 8:30 pm.

$-$$ **Pizzeria Venecia**, downtown, half a block west from the southwest corner of the Central Plaza, is one of the oldest restaurants in town and is famous for its delicious Italian platters and pizzas. Open daily 11 am to 9 pm.

$ **Fruti Licuados**, Plaza San Pablo, offers a variety of fruit shakes and some snacks.

$ **Chicken Friends**, next to the Catholic Church, serves chicken platters at modest prices.

$ **Cafeteria El Corral**, El Corral Supermarket, is a popular place for breakfast, lunch and pastries as well as for espresso and cappuccino.

Road Stops

La Granja D'Elia, on the main highway at the turn-off to La Esperanza, ☎ 773-0414, 773-4458, is open from 7 am to 5 pm.

This is a favorite stop for many travelers, given the excellent food and facilities. These include a grocery store that boasts a large selection of European wines, a bakery, meat market, restaurant with a first-rate buffet for between $3 and $4, hotel, playground, plant nursery, and a branch office of the Banco Atlántida.

$-$$ **Pizzeria Venecia**, on the highway south of town. This air-conditioned restaurant is a favorite traveler's lunch stop and is famous for its great Italian food and pizzas. There is parking and a playground. They also have a downtown location. Open daily from 11 am to 9 pm.

$ The **Betunia Restaurant and French Bread Shop**, near the La Esperanza detour, has a good buffet and is a popular intercity bus stop.

$ There are several gas stations on the highway in Siguatepeque, most of which serve fast food, including the **Texaco Center** on the turn-off to La Esperanza, which is open until 10 pm.

■ Comayagua

The city of Comayagua is the capital of the department of the same name, and is in the broad, flat, and fertile Comayagua Valley, surrounded by pine-clad mountains. The city is just off the main highway 21 miles (34 km) north of Tegucigalpa along the main route to San Pedro Sula.

History

Comayagua was the first capital of Honduras and remained so from 1573 to 1800. Steeped in Colonial history, the city was founded by Francisco de Montejo in 1537, only to be destroyed that same year during the rebellion led by Lenca Cacique Lempira. The Comayagua Valley was the last bastion of indigenous resistance to be put down, holding out until the first months of 1539. Soon after, with the discovery of silver in the region, the town was rebuilt. Due to its strategic location, it soon became the economic, political, and cultural center of the province and was granted the title of city from King Charles I in 1557. The city began to decline after independence from Spain in 1824, when an alternate capital was created in Tegucigalpa.

Comayagua

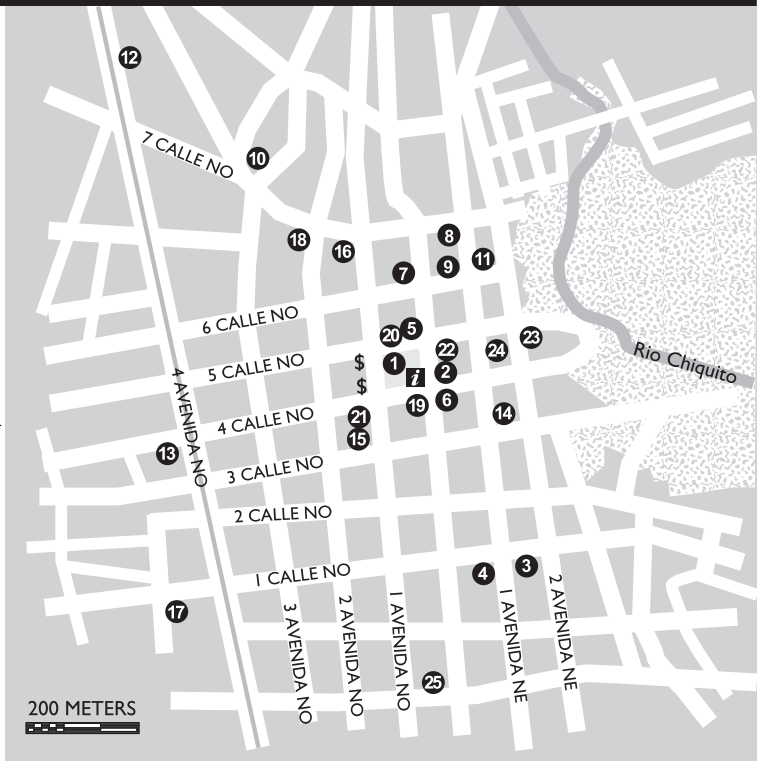
1. Central Park
2. Santa María Cathedral
3. La Merced Church
4. La Merced Plaza
5. Municipality
6. Museum of Colonial Religious Art
7. Museum of Anthropology & History
8. San Francisco Church
9. San Fransisco Plaza
10. Church of Charity
11. Caxa Real

PLACES TO STAY & EAT

12. Hotel Quan
13. Hotel American Inn
14. Villa Real Restaurant
15. Venecia Fast Food
16. Internet Café
17. Villareal Hotel/Tourist Center
18. Hotel Casa Grande B&B
19. Restaurante Palmeras
20. Casa Castillo Restaurante
21. Fruty Taco
22. La Gota de Limon Bar & Grill

SERVICES

23. Police
24. Hondutel & Post Office
25. Transportes Catrachos



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It was further damaged in 1827 by Guatemalan forces and in 1880 lost national importance altogether when President Soto moved the capital to Tegucigalpa permanently.

The City Today

In 1972, the Honduran Congress declared the City a National Monument because of its important historical patrimony. Recent restoration of Colonial treasures, which date back to the 16th century and incorporate Spanish and Maya influences, have given the city a new luster and definitely make the town worth a visit. As Comayagua was at one time an important religious center, the city has four Colonial-era churches. The most remarkable is the Cathedral of Comayagua with its intricately carved altars and imposing facade.

Comayagua also has two museums, the Museum of Colonial Religious Art and the Museum of Anthropology and History and several other Colonial building scattered throughout town. Local investors have followed restoration efforts, and a series of new restaurants and hotels have opened in old buildings. Aside from Colonial architecture, Comayagua holds some of the most elaborate Easter week religious activities in Honduras.

Unlike Siguatepeque, the weather in Comayagua can get rather hot, humid, and uncomfortable, so dress accordingly. If you plan to go hiking at higher altitudes, a light jacket should suffice.

Getting There & Getting Around

The center of Comayagua is about a mile (1.6 km) north from Highway CA-5 (the main highway between Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula). Buses between Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula drop passengers off at the intersection between the highway and the boulevard that leads into town. Taxis provide transportation into town for about 75¢. **Transportes Catrachos**, ☎ 772-0260, also provides hourly service to and from Tegucigalpa from a terminal five blocks south of the park. The city is built around the Central Plaza with Streets or Calles running north-south and Avenues or Avenidas going east-west. The

Plaza San Francisco is one block north of the central plaza and the Plaza La Merced is four blocks south.

Practicalities

The municipal tourism kiosk is on the northeast corner of the central plaza and provides general tourist information in both Spanish and English. They also have maps for sale. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to noon and from 2-5 pm.

Banking

Banco Atlántida, one block south of the plaza on 1 Ave, changes traveler's checks and has a Visa ATM. Open weekdays from weekdays from 9 am to noon and from 2-4 pm and Saturday from 9-11 am.

Ficensa, on the west side of the central plaza, offers cash advances on MasterCard and is open weekdays from 9 am to 4 pm and Saturday from 8:30-11:30 am.

Medical Facilities & Drugstores

Policlínica San Rafael, Barrio Arriba, ☎ 772-0068, offers 24-hour emergency service.

Policlínica Berlioz is directly behind the cathedral, ☎ 772-0133. Open Monday to Thursday from 8 am to noon and 2-5 pm.

Farmacia San Martin is one block south of the southeast corner of the park, ☎ 772-0056. It's open weekdays from 8 am to noon and 2-6 pm, and Saturday from 8 am to noon.

Government Services

The **police station**, ☎ 772-0080, emergencies ☎ 772-3040, is two blocks behind the cathedral and is open 24 hours. The **post office** is two blocks north of the park and is open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 4 pm. The **phone company (Hondutel)** is in the same building as the post office and is open daily from 8 am to 9 pm.

Internet

Neon MacroNet, Boulevard IV Centenario in front of Escuela Bilingual Honduras, ☎ 772-4495, offers Internet use, international telephone calls and a complete line of computer

and office services, which includes sale and rental of computers, accessories, and other office equipment. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 8 pm.

CyberCentro, 2 Ave, 1 Calle, offers Internet access and is open Monday to Saturday from 8 am to 7 pm.

Shopping

A market area is three blocks south of the cathedral. Stalls are usually open from about 7 am to 5 pm.

Annual Events

Easter: Sawdust carpets elaborated on Good Friday as part of the holy week's religious activities make a trip to Comayagua during Easter week worthwhile. Artisans work from midnight to around 9 am laying 24 colorful and uniquely designed sawdust carpets to receive the Way of the Cross (Vía Crucis) Procession.

Sightseeing

Santa María Cathedral

The most important historical site in town is the Santa María Cathedral, also known as the Church of the Immaculate Conception, on southeast corner of the park. The Cathedral was inaugurated on December 18, 1715 and is the largest and most elaborate ever built in Honduras. It contains magnificent examples of Baroque artwork, most notably the *Retablo del Rosario*, an enormous and elaborately carved wood and gold-plated altarpiece; as well as original paintings and polychrome carved wood sculptures by famed artist, Juan Martínez Montañés, of Seville, Spain. The Cathedral also houses a 12th-century clock, one of the oldest working clocks in the world. The *Reloj Arabe*, as it is known, was made around 1100 and graced the side of The Alhambra in Granada, Spain, before it was donated to Comayagua by King Felipe II. The cathedral is closed from around 11:30 am to 2 pm and after 4 pm.

Iglesia La Merced

La Merced Cathedral was built in 1550-1551 and is the oldest church in Honduras. The church originally had two belfries before one was destroyed in the 1774 earthquake. That same bell tower was also the first home to the Reloj Arabe, which was moved when the newer Cathedral was consecrated. This church also contains beautiful altarpieces as well as several statues dating back to the 17th century. Open daily from 5-7pm.

Plaza La Merced

Across from the church is the Plaza de la Merced, which was the original Central Plaza. The plaza is now known as Constitution Square or *La Plaza de la Constitución*, because of a huge monument erected there in commemoration of the nation's constitution, signed in 1812. The city's beautiful municipal building is also off this plaza.

Iglesía De La Caridad Illescas

The Saint Lucia church, which has a beautiful gold-plated altarpiece and an antique painting of Saint Lucia, was originally built for the use of indigenous worshippers in 1629. But the decline of the native population led to the inclusion of blacks and mestizos – who were imported as laborers – and the church was renamed La Iglesía de la Caridad or the Church of Charity. The facade was rebuilt in 1640 and a belfry was added in 1735.

Iglesía de San Francisco

On the San Francisco Plaza, this is one of the city's oldest churches, originally consecrated as the Church of San Anthony in 1560. But Franciscan monks renamed it when they took over religious duties in the area in 1574. The church had to be rebuilt twice after suffering structural damage during the earthquakes of 1704 and 1806. Of note are the elaborate altarpiece and the 15th-century Spanish bell.

San Sebastián Church

This was built in 1585 for the use of indigenous worshipers and is famed for its altar and the tomb of ex-president General José Trinidad Cabañas.

Caxa Real

The Royal House was built in 1739 and is near the town square. Originally it was used as the Governor's Mansion and to store royal coins. Although it has been restored, the building has suffered through earthquakes, fires, and neglect to the point where little of the original structure remains.

Museums

Regional Archaeological Museum (Museo Regional de Arqueología), one block north of Cathedral on Plaza San Francisco, ☎ 772-0386. This museum is in a Colonial building that was originally constructed at the end of the 1500s as a private home. Over the centuries the building was put to many uses – army offices, telegraph station, even the Ministry of the Interior – until 1940 when the Museum was founded. The newly restored museum now has bilingual (English/Spanish) historical exhibits on the Lenca culture and an outstanding collection of Lenca artifacts, including a pre-Columbian Lenca stela and jade jewelry. Part of the museum installation houses the Comayagua School of Artisans, which is responsible for carrying out restoration activities on national monuments throughout the city. The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday from 8 am to 4:30 pm. Admission is about $1.50. There is also a small coffee shop.

The **Museum of Colonial Religious Art** (Museo Colonial) is in the Parish House, across the street from the Cathedral. This small three-room museum contains relics embodying the city's Catholic traditions, which include clerical robes, antique furnishings, religious art, statues, chalices, and documents such as Francisco Morazán 's marriage certificate. There are also many gold and silver items dating from the 1500s to the 1700s that were originally in the city's churches. The building was constructed in 1678 for Comayagua's university, the first one in Central America. Open Monday to Saturday from 9.30-11.30 am and from 2-5 pm, on Sundays from 10 am to noon and 2-5 pm. Admission is about $1.

Eco-Adventures

Montaña de Comayagua

The Montaña de Comayagua was declared a National Park in the 1980s for its important role in the watershed of El Cajon, the hydroelectric dam that supplies electricity to the majority of Hondurans. Two principal rivers and thousands of smaller tributaries, forming the largest part of the powerful water flow that travels to the power plant, originate on the mountain. A variety of ecosystems found on the mountain are homes to such species as mountain lions, quetzals, orchids, bromeliads, and epiphytes. From Comayagua, several roads lead to towns or villages that surround the borders of the mountain.

The park is managed by **Ecosimco**, ☎ 772-4681, whose offices are on the highway towards La Libertad on the outskirts of town. Open weekdays from 8 am to 4:30 pm and Saturday from 8 am to noon. The tourist information kiosk in the central plaza also provides information concerning the park.

Getting There

Although well worth the effort, access to the park can be extremely difficult (particularly during the rainy season), and it can take up to two hours to reach the Village of Río Negro via the dirt road to San Jerónimo. There is regular transportation to Río Negro daily but it is in the back of a pick-up truck. There are three pick-ups that leave from Parque Merced in Comayagua every day, the first one leaving at 11:30, the second at 12:30 and the last at 1.

For those with 4 x 4 vehicles the road is no problem. From Comayagua one would drive to San Jerónimo, in the direction of La Libertad. Take the first road on your right upon entering San Jerónimo. Another two blocks and take another right, which will lead you past the school. This is the road that will lead to Río Negro. You pass Irlanda, San José, Planes de Churunes. The journey takes 1½ hours.

Once there, the tranquility, beautiful views, and surrounding cloud forest will captivate you. Hire an interpretive guide to lead you on a hike through the protected primary forest, which finishes at a beautiful waterfall (about $10 for 10 peo-

ple). There are 12 trained guides in the community. Eat dinner with a family, who will prepare the typical Honduran meal along with the natural wines native to the mountain for $1-$2. Or bring your own food and cook over an open fire. There are several *pulperías* or food stores to provide the necessities that you forgot. Stay in a private cabin, camp in a tent, or stay in the homes of locals. Cabins cost about $4 per person and tent rentals are also available. The friendly people are eager to serve and house visitors. Many will probably show, with pride, their latest artisan project and invite you to visit their coffee finca. If you arrive in November or December, go on a coffee-picking excursion; many farmers are willing and excited to take visitors to their finca to pick coffee.

The community has also created a series of wilderness trails, important for environmental education, and showcasing the ecological restoration that the community has achieved. The trail demonstrates the natural history of this humid subtropical forest by pointing out nests, burrows or food sources for wildlife. The flora of the zone is described along the trail, with local and scientific names, their uses (medicinal, edible, or preventing soil erosion), and the importance of almost every species that is common to the ecosystem. Río Negro has created a compilation of over 100 medicinal plants and has on hand a local specialist on the area's medicinal plants.

If interested in visiting Río Negro and/or lodging in the park, call **Jose Avilio Velazquez**, ☎ 990-0802 or write to info@vfamilycoffee.com. Another contact, especially for transport to Río Negro, is **Juan Gonzalez**. His cell number is ☎ 958-69-94.

Palmerola

The Comayagua Valley is also home to the Enrique Cano Soto Air Force Base (Palmerola). This base was initially used in the 1980s as a US military outpost during the Contra era. Since 1983, the United States has maintained a semi-permanent military presence at Honduras' Soto Cano Air Force Base. The US presence was established there to support US military and political interests in Central America, which were threatened by Communist expansion in the region. As the Nicaraguan threat has since disappeared, the number of US troops stationed in Palmerola has been drasti-

cally reduced. Presently, counter-drug operations, various aid, and relief missions are carried out from the base.

Where to Stay

$$ **Hotel Casa Grande Bed & Breakfast**, 7 Calle N.O., Barrio Abajo, ☎ 772-0512, 772-0772, www.casagrande-hotel.com, reservations@casagrande-hotel.com. This unique hotel is situated in a restored Colonial building with an interíor courtyard. The friendly atmosphere is accented by the tasteful design and décor of hand-carved mahogany furniture and woodwork, red tile floors, stucco walls, and Spanish tiled bathrooms. There are 10 double rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, ceiling fans, telephone, and internet. Rates include breakfast.

$$ **Hotel Santa Maria Comayagua**, on the highway after the entrance to Comayagua (white cement marker, km 82). This hotel has modern installations and offers 28 spacious rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, fan, and cable TV. Amenities include swimming pool, restaurant and bar.

$-$$ **Hotel Villa Real**, Colonia Brisas del Humuya, ☎ 772-1751, 772-1751, is a small and cozy hotel with a Colonial flare. There are 10 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c and cable TV. They have a swimming pool, sauna/gym, tennis courts, restaurant and bar. This is a good place to recoup your energy before continuing your travels.

$ **Hotel Morales**, Calle Colonia El Inva, ☎ 772-5035, 772-1601. Although not particularly charming this hotel offers 44 clean rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c and cable TV. Amenities include swimming pool, cafeteria, and bar.

$ **Hotel Quan**, at the end of the Boulevard on the right, ☎ 772-0070. There are 30 rooms with private bath, hot water, fan, a/c and cable TV. Hotel restaurant and bar.

$ **Hotel America Inn**, 1 Ave NO, 1 Calle NO, two blocks south of the park, ☎ 772-0360, ☎ 772-0009, offers clean rooms with nice beds and private bath, hot water, cable TV, a/c and fans.

Hotel Norimax Colonial, four blocks south and one block east of the park, ☎ 722-1703, is one of the better budget accommodations, with 15 cleans rooms with private baths, fans, a/c and cable TV. Air-conditioning and hot water are optional.

Hotel Norimax, four blocks south and three blocks west of the park, on Ave Manuel Bonilla, ☎ 772-1210, offers 14 clean rooms with private baths, fans, a/c and cable TV. Air-conditioning and hot water are optional.

Where to Eat

$ **Restaurante Palmeras**, on the south side of the park, serves good food in a comfortable ambience that includes breakfast, a daily lunch menu, and low-priced snacks such as sandwiches and tacos. Open daily from 7 am to 9 pm.

$ **Fruty Taco**, directly west of the southwest corner of the park, offers great fruit *licuados*, meat tacos and burgers.

$ **Helados Esquimo**, Central Plaza, has ice cream and soft drinks. Open daily from 8 am to 10 pm.

$ **Comida Rapida Vencia**, a block south of the cathedral, serves buffet meals and fresh fruit juices at moderate prices. Open Monday to Saturday from 7 am to 7:30 pm and Sunday from 7 am to 1:30 pm.

$ **Mang Ying** offers Chinese food in a fully air-conditioned environment. Open daily from 10 am to 10 pm.

$$ **Villa Real**, behind the cathedral, is definitely your best choice for a great meal in a lovely ambiance. The restaurant is set in a beautifully restored Colonial house and has an extensive menu, including pasta, grilled meats, and fish platters as well as a full bar. Open daily for lunch and dinner.

$-$$ **Hanemann's Bar & Grill** is owned and run by US expat Sean Hanemann and has an international menu with an emphasis in Cajun-style cuisine with a full bar. Open Wednesday to Monday from 6 pm and featuring Monday night football on TV.

$$ **Casa Castillo**, Central Plaza. This restaurant is in a renovated Colonial home and specializes in grilled beef, pork and sausage platters. Open for lunch and dinner. An alcohol-free establishment.

$-$$ **Turicentro Villareal** serves fast food such as pizza and hamburgers, with a full bar, a playground, and pool that is open to the public for $1.50 per person. Open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

$$ **La Gota de Limon Bar & Grill**, across from the cathedral, in the Bellavista Building. This restaurant offers a typical Honduran menu that includes steak and chicken platters as well as a variety of *pinchos* or kebobs. The full bar also has a variety of tropical fruit cocktails. Karaoki bar on weekends. Open daily from 4 pm-midnight.

$-$$ **GJ's Country Bar and Grill** is owned and run by a US expat, Jimmie, and offers good food at very reasonable prices. That includes the largest burgers in town, which you can enjoy while you watch the day's sporting events on TV. Open daily from 5 pm to midnight and on the weekends to 2 am. Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights are Karaoke nights from 7:30 p.m.

Tegucigalpa & Southeast Honduras

■ Tegucigalpa

Sprawled in a mountain valley at 3,000 feet (915 m), the capital city of Honduras is a bustling Latin American metropolis of over one million people. *Tegus*, as the city is called by the natives, is an eclectic mix of Colonial heritage and modern amenities, surrounded by shanty towns erected mostly by migrant country-folk, which eventually get built up into poorer neighborhoods and barrios.

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Due to the high elevation, the city enjoys a temperate spring-like climate all year, which averages about 75°F (24°C).

Downtown Tegucigalpa is the historical center of town, where you'll find many beautiful old buildings attesting to the city's past. Although those of us who live here have grown immune to its charm, visitors usually find the downtown area – full of cars and people – quite appealing. I've even heard it described as beautiful.

Numerous Colonial buildings will give the photographer a chance to shoot such landmarks as the Manuel Bonilla National Theater, the Church of Our Lady of Los Dolores, and the National Art Gallery. Also in the center, the Museo del Hombre Hondureño (Museum of the Honduran Man) features the work of contemporary Honduran artists, and the Museo Nacional de Honduras (National Museum of Honduras), which offers visitors a look at Honduran history. Farther afield is the superb Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Suyapa,

or the Basilica of Our Lady of Suyapa, patron saint of Honduras and the most revered site of Honduran Catholics.

Tegucigalpa is divided from its twin city of Comayagüela by the **Choluteca River**, which these days unfortunately receives most of the city's waste water. The river flows through the central mountain range and then the southern mountain range along the Pacific slope before descending into the Gulf of Fonseca. There are several bridges connecting Comayagüela and Tegucigalpa.

Tegucigalpa's downtown area is centered on the Central Plaza or ***Parque Central***. The newly redone *parque* is a good place to people-watch and get your bearings in the city center. Just be careful not to sit under a tree in the late afternoon. Thousands of birds roost in this and other city parks at night and there are plenty of droppings! The cacophony of their arrival between 5 and 6 in the evening can be heard for blocks.

Bordering one side of the park is the Saint Michael Archangel Parish Church, known simply as the Cathedral or ***La Catédral***. This handsome church was built between 1765 and 1782. It has a magnificent vaulted ceiling, and a domed altar that was sculpted by Guatemalan artist Vicente Gálvez. The church is currently being renovated.

From the park you can see the **Christ of the Picacho**, a massive statue of Christ that was built in 1997 to guard over us *capitalinos* (capital residents). The statue is perched on the hill (*El Picacho*) overlooking the city.

A pedestrian walk shoots off the park and is lined with street sellers and stores, coffee shops, and the post office at the end. There is a plan to relocate the street vendors in a new building that is currently being constructed, so they might not be here by the time you arrive. A winding street leads up from the center to La Leona Park or ***Parque La Leona***, perched on the hill above the city. Several apartment properties form garden neighborhoods in this area and, together with the park, they offer city dwellers a pocket of green.

The city's commercial district is around the **Boulevard Morazán**, where dozens of hotels, restaurants, stores and night spots can be found amid wealthy neighborhoods. Just a

short taxi ride away (about $3) is the **Multiplaza Mall**, which is a huge and modern complex with dozens of stores, a food court, a few restaurants, and several movie theaters.

Areas near the city also offer plenty of opportunities for a day-trip. On the hill north of the city is the **United Nations Park** (Parque de las Naciones Unidas), where you can visit the Christ statue, enjoy panoramic views of the city, and observe Honduran wildlife in the small zoo, including two very large and beautiful jaguars. Farther into the mountains, **La Tigra National Park**, a beautiful cloud forest that is open to the public, supplies nearly 40% of the city's water.

Several charming Colonial villages are also just a short drive away. **Ojojona**, which is a 30-minute drive on the highway to the south, has some interesting Colonial structures such as the church and several old and ornate bridges over brooks running through town. Another half-hour down the same highway is **Pespire**, a mountain village dominated by a Colonial church. A short distance off the highway to the eastern department of El Paraíso is the department capital, **Yuscarán**. This picturesque former mining town is probably the best-preserved Colonial town in Honduras, and it was declared a national monument in 1979.

Just a 20-minute drive on another road running northeast out of Tegucigalpa will bring you to the very pretty Colonial town of **Santa Lucia**. Another 20 minutes on the same road takes you to the slightly larger town of **Valle de Angeles**. Both are well preserved and geared up to greet the traveler.

History

Prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the Chorotega tribe inhabited the Tegucigalpa and south coast regions, but they were dominated and assimilated into the new culture created by colonization. The Spanish typically settled in areas where native populations lived in order to take advantage of the readily available, though rebellious, workforce. In 1539 they established **San Miguel**, which in 1580 was officially declared the township of *San Miguel de Heredia de la Taguzgalpa*, after

rich veins of silver were discovered in the area. The most productive mines were found in Yuscarán (Guasucarán), Ojojona, Zapuasuca (El Picacho)/Tegucigalpa, and Santa Lucía. The town gained importance as a mining center and rivaled Comayagua for the status of capital. After independence, the capital was switched back and forth between the two until it was permanently settled at Tegucigalpa in 1880 by President Marco Aurelio Soto. Some claim Soto made the move in revenge for public disdain shown his wife in Comayagua. His decision was probably based on stronger political allies in Tegucigalpa and the fact that he was a partner in the Rosario Mining Company, whose operations where based in San Juancito, about 25 miles (40 km) outside of Tegucigalpa.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Traditionally, it is said that the word Tegucigalpa derives from the Nahuatl word "Taguzgalpa" and means "Silver Mountain," with reference to the rich lodes of silver mined in the hills and mountains around present day Tegucigalpa. This is the official version and what is taught in schools. However, as other writers have pointed out, this explanation doesn't make much sense because the Indians prior to colonization didn't mine. In fact, Taguzgalpa is "the capul or kin group of Tecuciztecatl (an Aztec deity)." As early as 1901, one scholar states that the capital obtained its name from the Aztec word *Tetl Huitztli Calli Pan*, which means "In the houses of pointed stones," so named because of large number of pointed rocks that are found near the Zapuasuca hill (today El Picacho), at the foot of which Tegucigalpa lies today.

Getting There

By Plane

Toncontín International Airport is in Tegucigalpa, a little more than four miles (seven km) from the center, with flights arriving daily from nearly every point in Honduras and Central America, as

well as Miami, Houston, Los Angeles, Mexico, and Panama. American Airlines, Continental, Taca Airlines, and Copa Airlines fly here.

As you fly into the city, the mountain topography is quite evident, and most planes come in from the north, loop around and land facing north on a very short runaway. Needless to say, this is not a pleasant experience. So brace yourself for an abrupt landing. Fortunately, the pilots are very experienced at this maneuver, but plans to expand the runway are now in the making.

MONEY-CHANGING

At the airport, this is done by independent money-changers outside the international arrivals terminal, but they exchange only US dollars and lempiras. You could also pay your taxi in dollars and wait to get to a bank to change larger amounts. Although money-changers usually offer a better exchange rate than the banks, displaying large amounts of cash in public is never wise. But, at the airport, this is a convenient option for your left-over lempiras when you are leaving and in a hurry.

By Bus

Roads leading into Tegucigalpa include highways from the north and south coasts, from the department of Olancho, and from the eastern department of El Paraíso.

Buses of all types arrive daily from every major Honduran cities, as well as from nearby countries. With the exception of a few luxury lines, most of the bus terminals are in Comayagüela. It is not a good idea to stay in the area or to walk around there, especially with your luggage. Taxis are always waiting for incoming buses and your best option is to take one to your hotel. Most will charge $5-$8 for that.

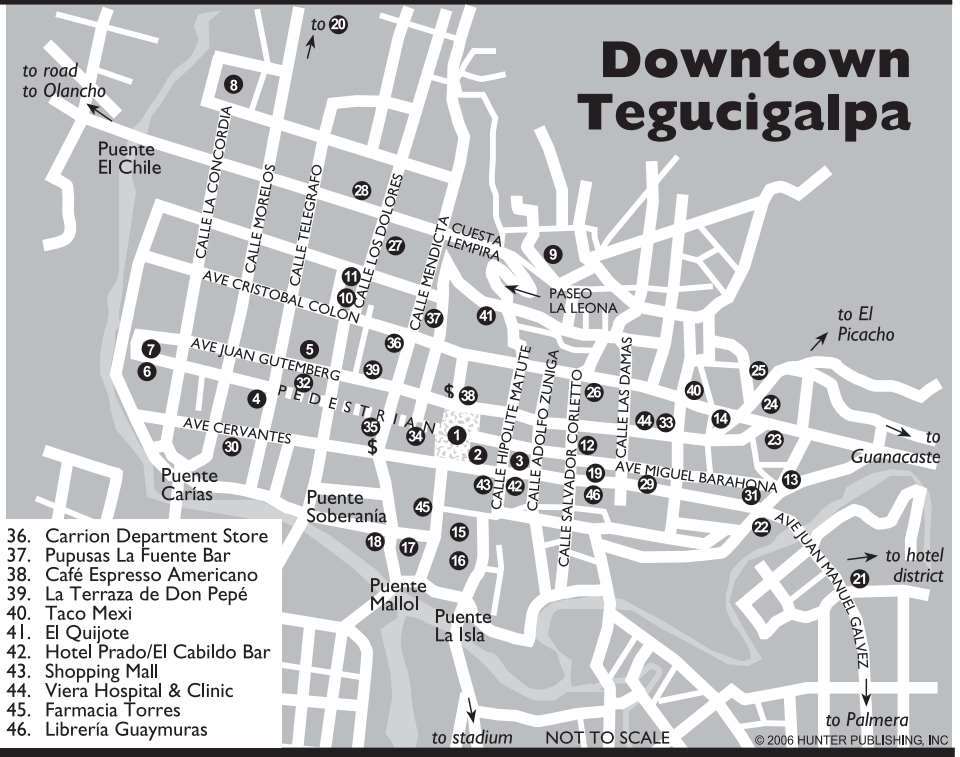
Getting Around

Tegucigalpa can be confusing to get around. The city has grown quickly, with very little planning. Taxis are plentiful and, although they have become somewhat expensive in comparison to other cities, taking a taxi is the easiest way to get anywhere. However, many of the streets in Tegucigalpa do not have names posted and many taxi drivers cannot take you to other than the major locations. It's always a good idea to ask the driver in advance if they know the place you want to go. Although they probably can get you to the general area, getting specific directions beforehand is a good idea.

From downtown, the **Boulevard Morazán** and **Palmira** commercial district is an easy half-hour walk. Buses and route taxis only skirt this area. So, if you stay downtown and want to eat or shop there, you can walk or bargain with a taxi driver to take you for about Lps. 50 ($3) and vice-versa.

The street on the north side of Parque Central, the **Ave Juan Gutemberg** runs east out of town and is the northern edge of Colonia Palmira, where it is named **Ave La Paz**. This is where you will find the US Embassy – an easily identifiable landmark and reference point. But this route takes you through the **Guanacaste** district, a three-block market area, which is not a very good district for walking. You can take a shared or *colectivo* taxi for about 50¢ from the taxi point on the street north of the park between Banco Atlántida and Espresso Americano. These go through the Guanacaste and to the Ave La Paz. For about a mile after the Guanacaste Bridge, any street south leads to the Boulevard Morazán (about four blocks down).

The best way to get in or out of downtown on foot is the **Ave Cervantes/Ave Juan Manuel Galvez**, which from the south side of the Parque Central runs east up to the Hotel Honduras Maya and the Colonia Palmira and the Boulevard Morazán. You can either turn left and walk past the Hotel Maya into Palmira and the hotel district or continue straight for about 3½ blocks to one of the boulevard's overpasses. Most *colectivo* taxi stationed south of the park go by the Hotel Maya and under the overpass, which is a good option if it's raining



1. Central Park
2. Cathedral
3. Chinda Díaz Pulpuería
4. Post Office (Hondutel)
5. Phone Company (Hondutel)
6. Manuel Bonilla Theater
7. Herrera Park
8. La Concordia Park
9. La Leona Park
10. Plaza Los Dolores
11. Our Lady of Dolores Church
12. Valle Park
13. Arbolito La Plazuela
14. Finlay Park
15. National Art Gallery
16. Congressional Building
17. Central Bank Arturo H Medrano Art Gallery
18. Museum of History
19. Museum of Honduran Man
20. Villa Roy Museum of Republican History
21. Hotel Honduras Maya
22. Best Western Hotel Excelsior
23. Hotel Granada #1
24. Hotel Granada #2
25. Hotel Granada #3
26. Tobacco Road Tavern
27. Hotel Istmania
28. Hotel MacArthur
29. Cocina Creativa
30. Comedor Vegetariano
31. Café La Plazuela
32. Salman's Bakery
33. Salman's Bakery
34. Super Donuts
35. Supermarket
36. Carrion Department Store
37. Pupusas La Fuente Bar
38. Café Espresso Americano
39. La Terraza de Don Pepé
40. Taco Mexi
41. El Quijote
42. Hotel Prado/El Cabildo Bar
43. Shopping Mall
44. Viera Hospital & Clinic
45. Farmacia Torres
46. Librería Guaymuras

or you don't want to walk. Be sure to ask the driver, though, as some take the stadium route to the Boulevard Suyapa.

South of the city across the river, **Comayagüela** contains budget hotels and the city's largest market area. This is where most of the intercity bus stations are located. Comayagüela is easier to get around than "Tegus," as Tegucigalpa is know locally. This is because the streets and avenues are organized in a grid system. However, Comayagüela is not particularly attractive and can be dangerous. Crime rates are high and walking around in the area is not recommended, especially at night. You can easily take a taxi to and from your hotel.

The **Puente La Isla** (bridge) crosses the river along the street out of downtown to the stadium and in the background is the **Juan A. Lainez Park** with the Peace Monument (*Monumento*) perched on the top. The monument was built in commemorate the end of the Soccer War with El Salvador. Although you can walk up to the monument for a view of the city, I don't recommend doing so. The area is too solitary and you never know who's lurking in the bushes. The western end of the Boulevard Morazán terminates at the stadium, but this is definitely the longest route from downtown to the Boulevard Morazán or Palmira commercial districts, as the commercial district commences about six blocks from the stadium. The Peace Monument is a good reference point south of the city as it is visible from nearly everywhere, as is the Christ Statue on the hill to the north.

If you are staying in Tegucigalpa for more than a few days and plan to walk around, investing in a **map** is a good idea. You can acquire a detailed map of Tegucigalpa at the Ministry of Tourism's Information Center or in one of several stores (even some pharmacies) in the downtown area. They sell city maps for about $3. Look for a small and simple sign on the door or window that says "City Maps of Tegucigalpa."

Practicalities

Banking & Currency Exchange

Most of the banks in Tegucigalpa have branches throughout the city and your hotel will be able to tell you which are closest

to you. Money-changers hang out at the western end of the Pedestrian Street downtown in front of the post office every day and all day from about 6 am to 6 pm; they sometimes offer a slightly better rate than the banks. Although changing on the corner may seem somewhat seamy, most of the money changers are honest businessmen who have been there for years and who everyone in the area knows. Just be careful of who's watching and try not to exchange large amounts. Out of sight in the bank is a much safer option.

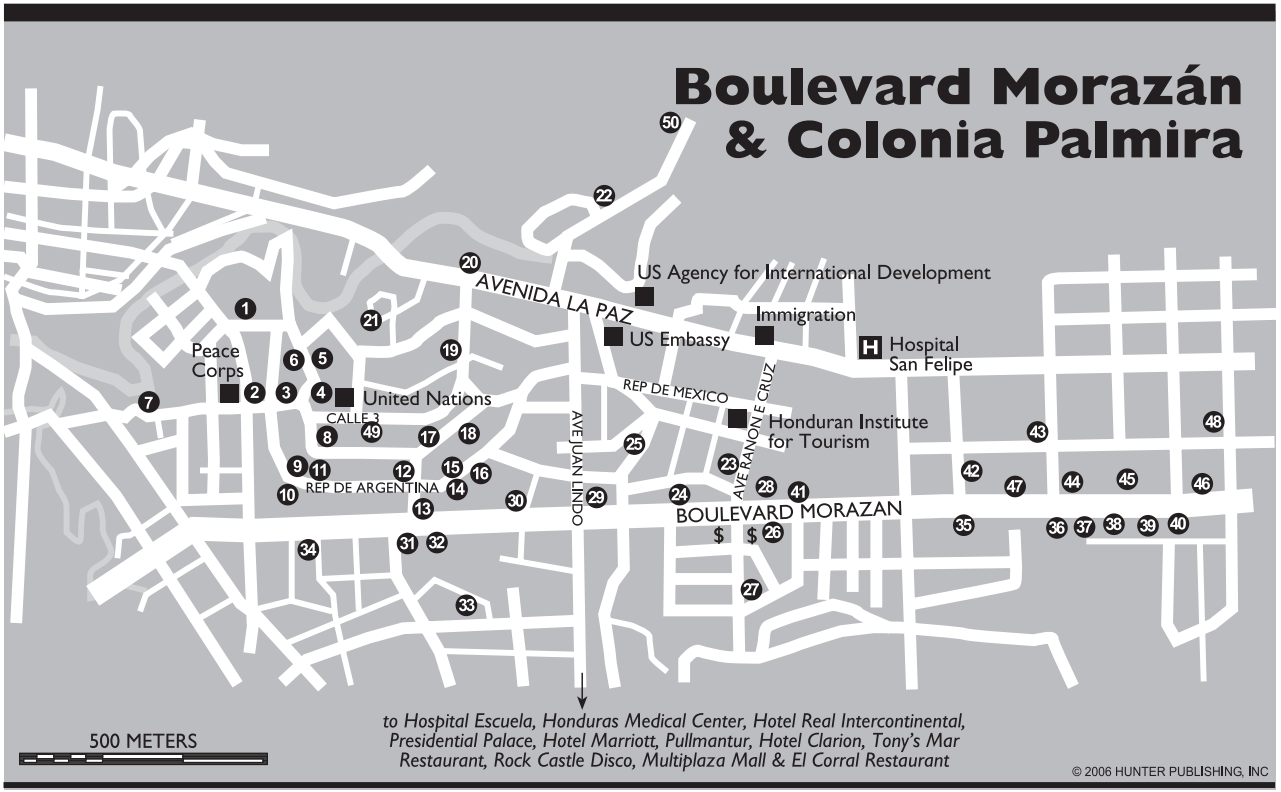
Banco Atlántida, north of The centRal plaza, has an ATM machine for Visa cards, cashes traveler's checks, and makes cash advances on Visa cards. Open weekdays from 9 am to 3 pm.

Banco Credomatic, which offers cash advances on Visa and MasterCard, has several locations throughout the city. Most of them are open weekdays from 9 am to 5 pm and on Saturday from 9 am to noon. One location is downtown on the corner of Calle Mendieta and Ave Cervantes. Follow the pedestrian street west for a block to Calle Mendieta and turn left. Walk another very short city block and the bank is on the other side of the street at the corner. On the Boulevard Morazán across the street from Los Castaños Shopping Center, the bank's main office is in a large and easily identifiable building with a BAC sign. This is the place to go if your credit card gets stolen. There are two branches in the Multiplaza Mall, one in the main mall (open weekdays from 10 am to 7 pm and on Saturday and Sunday from 10 am to 5 pm), and another in the newer annex.

Pharmacies

There is a drugstore on nearly every block in the downtown area and in all the shopping centers. Most pharmacies post paper signs daily on the door, window or outside wall stating the name and address of the *Farmacia de Turno*, which is the pharmacy on duty. Pharmacies or drugstores on duty stay open until 10 pm, some a little later. You can also call ☎ 192 for the same information in Spanish.

Downtown, the **Torres Fiallos Drugstore**, in front of the Parque La Merced (next to the Congressional Building), ☎ 237-1208 , is probably the best stocked. Ask for Moncha,



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1. Hotel Hoduras Maya
2. CIISA Building
3. Hotel Plaza San Martin
4. Leslie's B&B Place
5. Confort Guest House
6. Gino's Pasta Café
7. Linda Vista B&B
8. Nobu
9. Café La Milonga-Tango
10. Saint Honoré Restaurant
11. Rojo, Verde y Ajo Restaurant
12. Taco Taco Bar, Lavandería Maya (laundromat)
13. Dry Clean USA
14. Café Savant, New Age Café
15. The Bakery Center Building
16. Tre Fratelli Restaurant
17. Casal B&B
18. Hotel Portal del Angel
19. Furiwa #2
20. Más x Menos Supermarket
21. Toyota Rent-a-Car
22. La Reforma Theater House
23. Cam Fong Restaurant
24. Los Castaños Shopping Mall
25. Metro Media Bookstore
26. Delipan Bakery
27. Casa Maria
28. El Patio Restaurant
29. Kodak
30. Wendy's
31. Salman's Bakery
32. Taco Loco Restaurant
33. La Albahaca Restaurant
34. Guadeloupe Church
35. El Dorado Mall
36. Popeye's
37. Burger King
38. Quiznos
39. Dunkin Donuts/Baskin Robbins
40. Pizza Hut
41. Iguana Rana Bar
42. Vinalia Wine Café
43. Ni Fu Ni Fa Restaurant
44. KFC
45. TGI Friday's
46. El Patio (#2)
47. Arenas Sports Café
48. Bamboo
49. Back Street Bar & Disco
50. San Pablo Market
    (buses to Valle de Angelse, San Juna de Flores)

who is always very helpful. Open weekdays from 9 am to noon and 2-6 pm, Saturday from 9 am to noon.

Private Medical Facilities

Honduras Medical Center, Colonia Las Minitas, Ave Juan Lindo, ☎ 216-1500, 216-1584, 216-1244, www.hmc.hn, is five blocks due south from the Boulevard Morazán intersection. The intersection has a stoplight and a McDonald's on the southeast corner, as well as a Kodak Center with a drive-through on the northeast corner. HMC is Tegucigalpa's newest and largest private hospital and offers a wide array of medical and lab services, a drugstore and a 24-hour emergency room and ambulance service.

Hospital y Clínicas Viera, Barrio La Ronda, 5 Calle, 11-12 Ave, No. 1115, ☎ 237-3160. Tegucigalpa's oldest private hospital offers complete medical and lab services with a drugstore and a 24-hour emergency room and ambulance service.

Hospital La Policlinca, 3 Ave, 7-8 Calle, ☎ 237-5194. Although this very large private hospital is in a bad neighborhood, it has a lot of good doctors who provide complete medical and lab services, a drugstore, and a 24-hour emergency room and ambulance service.

Centro Médico Hondureño, Barrio La Granja, 3 Ave 3 Calle, Comayagüela, ☎ 225-0028. This small, private hospital is not easy to find, so if you have an emergency, you should take a taxi with a driver who knows the way. Complete medical, lab, and emergency services and lower prices for some services than the larger hospitals. Doctors generally don't charge any less, but services such as the lab services, use of operating room, intensive care, nursing, and medicine during a stay tend to be less expensive.

Diagnósticos Médicos (DIME), Colonia Humuya, Ave Ucrani, No. 2901. ☎ 239-2598, 239-9630, 239-1096. This is another hard one to find, so take a taxi with a driver who knows the way. Open from 7 am to 6 pm on a first-come, first-served basis. This modern clinic specializes in orthopedic care and is the best place to go if you break anything. Although it is probably more expensive than any other, paying their price is well worth it, as you don't want to end up crippled. Also, as they have the best equipment and can make

a correct diagnosis, they won't recommend unnecessary treatments.

Public Medical Facilities

Hospital Escuela, Blvd. Suyapa, and the **Hospital General San Felipe** on the Ave La Paz both have 24-hour emergency rooms.

The Red Cross, ☎ 237-8654, Calle Real, on the corner of the Parque de La Libertad in Comayagüela, runs the blood bank.

Government Services

There are police stations throughout the city in or near almost every neighborhood and barrio. To report a theft or any other crime go to the **police station**, ☎ 222-8736, half a block from behind the Los Dolores church downtown. The **phone company (Hondutel)**, is on Ave Cristobal Colón and is open 24 hours. Reversible charges are available to the United States and Europe. The **post office** is across the street at the end of the Pedestrian Walkway west of The centRal plaza and is open on weekdays from 7:30 am to 7 pm or on Saturday from 8 am to 1 pm.

Emergency Numbers

- Medical 195
- Police 199
- Fire 198

Information

Honduran Institute of Tourism, Edificio Europa, Calle República de México, Colonia San Carlos. ☎ 222-2124, toll free in Honduras ☎ 800-222-8687, toll free in the US and Canada ☎ 1-800-460-9608, www.letsgohonduras.com. English speakers will provide any information you might need and provide free maps, pamphlets, hotel and restaurant guides for different cities and regions that they have in stock at the moment. Open weekdays from 7:30 am to 3:30 pm.

Internet

Internet cafés are on nearly every block downtown and in all the malls and shopping centers. Internet cafés are a much

cheaper option for long distance phone calls than Hondutel (11¢/minute versus $1.50 for Hondutel).

Newspapers

The daily newspapers *La Tribuna* and *El Heraldo* are both published in Tegucigalpa and provide extensive listings of local activities. *Honduras This Week* (HTW), an English-language paper, is a weekly that comes out on Saturday and is easily obtainable in most hotels for free. Check out HTW's Maya Calendar for activities.

Photography

Kodak has three locations: one on Ave Cervantes, across the street from the southwest corner of Parque Central; another small building with a drive-through on a corner of the Boulevard Morazán at the first stoplight from west to east; and another in the Multiplaza Mall on the second floor. Kodak offers a variety of camera equipment, sells and develops film, and prints digital photographs.

Laundry

Most hotels offer laundry services and this is the easiest option. Most people in Honduras wash their clothes by hand and laundry services are scarce. Ask at the desk or ask the maid who cleans your room.

Lavandería Maya, which offers both dry cleaning and laundry services, has two locations – in the Colonia Palmira, 1½ blocks from Boulevard Morazán on the Calzada Maipu (from west to east, turn left when Salman's Bakery is on your right; and in Plaza Miraflores.

Dryclean USA is about half a block from Boulevard Morazán and half a block before Lavandería Maya on Calzada Maipu.

Downtown, **Lavandería Electrónica**, Ave Gutemberg, Barrio Guanacaste, offers both dry cleaning and laundry services. If you choose this location, be sure to stay extra alert in this somewhat seamy barrio.

Learning

Conversa Language School, Ave Republica de Argentina, No. 257, in front of Tre Fratelli Restaurant, Colonia Palmira, ☎ 231-1874, aerohond@david.intertel.hn, offers 25 years of

experience in language teaching with flexible schedules and home stays available.

Travel Agencies

Multiviajes, Edificio Europa, Ave Ramón E. Cruz, Colonia San Carlos, ☎ 222-2124, is in the same building as the Institute of Tourism on the ground floor outside. Multiviajes is the best travel agency in Honduras. Rowina Barahona and her friendly staff will go out of their way to find you the airline route, whether it be national or international, that best fits your schedule.

Tour Operators

Déstinos de Exito, Edificio Europa, Calle República de México, Colonia San Carlos, ☎ 236-9651, www.destinosdeexito.com, info@destinosdeexito.com. This tour operator is in the same building as the Institute of Tourism on the ground floor outside. Déstinos offers day-trips to sites around Tegucigalpa and various tours to other parts of the country.

ECOTURSA (Ecology, Culture & Tourism), Barrio Concepción, 2 Ave, half a block from Parque la Libertad, Comayagüela, ☎ 238-8892, is a new tour operator run by a native of the Moskitia, Edgardo Benitez. Although it is not as well established as other tour operators, Edgardo has extensive knowledge of the Moskitia and is offering multi-day expeditions to the area at modest prices.

Bicycle Rentals

Hondubikes, Col. Humuya Ave Sabana 1C, #2744, ☎ 239-2192. Mario rents bicycles at very reasonable rates. This place is a little hard to find and not likely well known by many taxi drivers, so it's best to call ahead. As a reference point, the University José Cecilio del Valle is on the street that runs parallel to the one where this business is located.

Shopping

Mall Multiplaza, www.multiplaza.hn, has over 50 stores, movie theaters, a fast-food court, and a supermarket. Behind the mall is **Pricesmart**, a large warehouse supermarket and **Tony Roma's Restaurant**. ATMs are available.

Plaza Miraflores, Colonia Miraflores, is a smaller mall, but with plenty of stores, eateries, movie theaters, and a supermarket. ATMs available

Centro Comercial Los Castaños, Blvd. Morazán, is a small shopping center with stores, eateries, beauty parlors, and a supermarket. ATMs available

The **Saturday Agricultural Fair** is held in the parking lot next to the stadium from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning. Small producers bring their goods to market to sell here. These include vegetables, fruit, dry goods, fresh seafood (sometimes still alive!), chicken, pork, beef, used clothes, flowers, plants, small handmade furniture, and truckloads of basic supplies such as juices, milk, toilet paper, shampoo, soap, etc. The prices at this market are very reasonable and the market tends to be the fullest on Saturday morning. The best prices are offered Sunday mornings, when everyone is ready go home; but, depending on the weather, the produce can be somewhat wilted by then.

Supermarkets

All the malls and shopping centers include a supermarket.

The **Más x Menos** on Ave La Paz, just past the river bridge out of the center, has the best selection of US canned and packaged goods. ATMs available

Paíz Supermarket downtown is a block from the Central Plaza. Follow the Pedestrian Street one block west from the Park, turn left, walk 10 paces and the supermarket is on the other side of the street, next to Banco Credomatic. ATMs available

Bookstores

Metromedia has two stores, a main store located in the Colonia Palmira, on Calle República de Colombia, two blocks behind the Los Castaños Shopping Center; and a smaller branch in the Multiplaza Mall on the first floor. The larger store has a coffee shop and offers a large selection of US newspapers and magazines, plus the largest selection of books in English, consisting mostly of bestsellers, including fiction, nonfiction, children's books, and travel.

Flamingo Books in Los Castaños Mall in Colonia Palmira offers a much smaller selection of books, including Spanish translations of books written in English, a few new titles in Spanish, and a couple of nice photo books on Honduras, among others.

The Book Store, next to Super Donuts on the Boulevard, about half a block west of the Los Castaños Mall in Colonia Palmira, distributes school texts in English. Surprisingly, they also have a small, but very good selection of fiction in English.

Librería Guaymuras, Ave Cervantes almost at Calle Las Damas, has its own publishing house – Editorial Guaymuras – and the best selection of Spanish-language titles in Honduras. They also carry a very small selection of books in English, mostly by local authors.

Café Paradiso, across from *El Arbolito*, a huge cypress tree where the street does a turn-around, at the end of Ave Miguel Paz Barahona, is a coffeehouse, bar, art gallery, and bookstore, which offers contemporary titles by Honduran authors.

The **Hotel Honduras Maya** has a small souvenir shop that sells US newspapers and magazines.

Sightseeing

Museums

Most of Tegucigalpa's museums are within walking distance of the *Parque Central*.

National Art Gallery

The Galería Nacional de Arte is one block south of the *Parque*, in the Plaza de Merced, next to the Congressional Building. This outstanding museum is dedicated to Honduran art, with works ranging from Maya ceramics to Colonial paintings to contemporary artwork.

The two-story museum building is set around a beautifully renovated central patio, complete with a well. It was built in 1654 by the San Pedro Nolasco Convent. From 1857 to 1968, the first University in Honduras was housed there. A major restoration began in 1985 and the edifice became the home of the National Art Gallery in 1994.

The building is a good introduction to the characteristic Colonial-style buildings of Honduran history. The walls are painted white and the dark wood that frames the doors and windows sets off the fact that the adobe is two feet thick in some areas. The ceilings and some of the windows are supported by mahogany beams.

The architecture alone makes this building a work of art, but it is also a gallery. The stark walls, warm woods, and neutral tiles are a perfect setting for a representative collection of Honduran art. The collection is presented through 12 halls that are tastefully arranged in chronological order, from pre-Colombian carvings and sculpture to modern masterpieces. There is also a salon for frequent temporary exhibits, and cultural, social, tourist, and artistic events. Open Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 4 pm and on Sunday from 9 am to 1 pm. Admission is $1. Call ☎ 237-9884 for information regarding upcoming events and exhibits.

Museum of History

Museo Histórico de la República is one block west of the Galería Nacional de Arte. The former presidential palace of Honduras, which is an interesting 19th-century structure with gardens along the river, is now a museum depicting the history of Honduras since Independence from Spain. Open Tuesday to Saturday from 9 am to noon and from 1:30-4 pm. Admission is $1.

Museum of the Honduran Man

Museo del Hombre Hondureño, Ave Cervantes, four blocks east of the Central Plaza, is a large one-story Colonial building that has been painted a dark gray, which makes it appear very staid. The edifice was originally the home of liberal reformist Ramon Rosa and later it housed the Supreme Court of Justice. The Museum functions as an art gallery for Honduran painters, has a restoration workshop, and permanent exhibits of antique paintings and artifacts pertaining to the evolution of the Honduran man. Similar to the National Gallery of Art, this building has been renovated in a rather lavish fashion and is often used to entertain visiting dignitaries. Open weekdays from 8:30 to noon and from 1:30 to 5:30 pm. Admission is free.

Military History Museum

The Museo Histórico Militar is adjacent to the Parque Valle. To get there, walk two blocks east down Ave Miguel Barahona from the eastern end of the Pedestrian Street by the Cathedral, and you'll see the park on your left. This museum has antique and modern firearms, personal objects, photographs, and displays of various military heroes and Honduran strongmen. Open weekdays from 8:30 to noon and from 1:30-5:30 pm. Admission is free.

Villa Roy Museum of Republican History

Museo de Historia Republicano Villa Roy, Barrio Buenos Aires, north of downtown. From the end of the pedestrian walkway turn right onto Calle Morelos and continue straight for seven blocks. The last three blocks are up a hill. The museum is on the right-hand side of the street. You can also get to the Calle Morelos by following the street behind Los Dolores Church two blocks west and then turning right. This museum is an 18th-century mansion – formerly the home of President Lozano Díaz – and features portraits, paraphernalia, and other interesting items from past presidents. Other exhibits and displays include pre-Colombian archaeological objects, and a section covering the eight indigenous groups of Honduras. Open from Tuesday to Saturday from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm. Admission is $1.

LA CONCORDIA PARK

On your way up or down to the Villa Roy Museum, you might want to turn left off Calle Morelos at the corner of La Colonia Supermarket and walk a block to the Parque La Concordia, a small park with replicas of Maya temples. Stay alert once you've passed the supermarket, as the park is somewhat secluded and at times rife with thieves from a nearby slum area.

Banco Atlántida Art Gallery, Sala Bancatlan

Sala Bancatlan, Plaza Bancatlan, Boulevard Miraflores, is a private collection of valuable pre-Hispanic artifacts, coins and

some of the best contemporary paintings by Honduran artists. Open weekdays from 9 am to 3 pm. To get there either hire a taxi or take a shared taxi from downtown to Plaza Miraflores. The exhibit is in a large building in the Plaza Bancatlan compound on the corner across the street.

Central Bank Museums

Rigoberto Borjas Numismatic Museum, Central Bank Annex, 5-6 Ave, 11-12 Calle, Comayagüela, ☎ 237-7979, www.bch.hn/museon.php. This museum has a permanent exhibit of Honduran coins and currency dating back to the 1900s. Open Tuesday to Friday from 9 am to noon and 1-4 pm and on Sunday from 9 am to 1 pm. It's best to take a taxi to this museum, as it is in the heart of Comayagüela, an area with a high crime rate. Admission is 50¢.

Central Bank Arturo H. Medrano Art Gallery, across the street from the Congressional Building, two blocks south of The centRal plaza. This is the best collection of Honduran paintings available to the public, with the work of 28 master artists on display. Open weekdays from 9 am to 4 pm. A must-see. Admission is free.

Museum of Natural History

The Museo de Historia Natural houses displays on the country's eco-systems and animal life, as well as a collection of stuffed specimens. Admission is 50¢. The museum is at the National University in the Biology Department, which is in Building CB. The University Campus is near the Suyapa Basilica.

Honduran Air Museum

The Museo del Aire de Honduras is at Toncontin Airport, behind the Officer's Club at the Air Force Base, ☎ 233-4623, 233-4692. This outdoor museum at the airfield has a collection of 18 airplanes. The oldest, a North American NA-16, dates back to 1936. Other interesting models include a Bell P-63E King Cobra from 1948 and a Boeing Stearman PT17 from 1946. On weekdays groups are received upon appointment. Open Saturday, Sunday and holidays from 10 am to 5pm. Admission is $10.

Iguana Adventure

The **Biosfera Ecocentro Iguana Farm**, Colonia La Joya, road to Los Llanos. To get there follow the boulevard past Plaza Miraflores about a mile until you see a sign for the Colonia La Joya on the right side of the road. Turn onto this road and after about two miles there is another sign on the right-hand side for the Iguana Farm. The Iguana Farm breeds captive iguanas and is the only wildlife rehabilitation in Tegucigalpa. Admission is about 50¢ and the farm is open every day except Wednesdays from 9 am to 5 pm.

Day-Trips

There are many possibilities for transportation for your day-trips to Tegucigalpa's surrounding areas. The budget-minded can take a bus to their destination. You can ask your hotel to help you arrange transport, seek out a van in the hotel district, hire a taxi or rent a van. One rental service is with **Rosa de Farach**, ☎ 257-3733, for van rental by the hour, day or week, including a driver and Spanish-to-English interpreter.

Santa Lucia, Valle de Angeles and San Juancito-El Rosario form the **Real Minas tourist circuit** that runs east of the capital city – named for the mining activity that developed in these communities, dating back to the 15th century in the case of Santa Lucía. You can make a day-trip to either or stay the night as comfortable accommodations are available in both Santa Lucia and Valle de Angeles.

These are two small towns along a scenic route through pine-clad hills that runs northeast out of the capital. Buses (50¢) travel to Valle de Angeles hourly from the Esso gas station in front of the San Felipe Hospital on Ave Los Proceres, after the US Embassy. You can also get to Santa Lucia on this bus, but the junction from the road to the village is a pleasant two-mile walk. You could always thumb a ride into the village along the way, as pick-up truck drivers often give travelers a ride. Buses to Santa Lucía leave Tegucigalpa from the Mercado San Pablo, Colonia Reparto, every 30 minutes until 6 pm; the last bus back leaves around 5:30 pm.

Santa Lucia

This is a beautiful 500-year-old village of steep and winding cobblestone streets, rural edifices, white-washed adobe homes with red tile roofs and an overlook plaza perched on the hillside with spectacular views of pine-covered mountains and the capital in the distance.

Surrounded by hills of pine forest, Santa Lucia was an important mining town during Colonial times, the legacy of which is apparent in the architecture. Proof of the town's importance is the 1574 crucifix of Christ that the king of Spain ordered built specifically for the local church and which can still be seen today. About half a mile uphill from the church is a vineyard with great views of the mountains, valley and capital in the background. Ask the caretakers for a tour.

At 5,000 feet (1,524 m), the cool climate and rural ambience has attracted the upper classes and the small town has become a wealthy suburb of Tegucigalpa, a favorite outing for city folks on the weekend. The cooler weather also encourages flower growers and a plentitude of exotic flowers can be seen throughout the town, or for sale in Tegucigalpa. Pottery-making is another forte of this village and you can buy a beautiful handmade keepsake along the road or in one of town's shops. About a mile from the junction is the **Santa Lucia Serpentarium**, a private collection of snakes native to Honduras. Here you will find some of the most venomous snakes in the country, as well as non-poisonous specimens. The Serpentarium is open daily from 9 am to 4 pm. Admission is free, but there is a donation box, which helps provide funds for the maintenance of the site.

Where to Stay & Eat

Although a small town, services in Santa Lucia are increasing, and there are several places to eat and stay.

$$ **Hotel Santa Lucía Resort**, ☎ 236-9179, hotel_santa_lucia@yahoo.com, is a blend of the rustic and the modern with comfortable cabin accommodations, private baths, hot water, great views, an upscale restaurant, and a patio filled with outdoor grills, swings, and gardens.

$$ **La Posada de Las Nubes**, ☎ 779-0441, posada_lasnubes@yahoo.com. This small hotel offers four rooms with private bath, hot water, ceiling fans, and a TV. Amenities include bar, cafeteria, room service, souvenir shop, parking, and a commanding view of town and the valley of Tegucigalpa in the background. The cafeteria's international menu also provides a good meal during a day-trip to the town.

$-$$ **Parrillada Miluska**, the oldest restaurant in town, offers excellent Czech cuisine that includes goulashes, wieners, and strudels, with outdoor dining, swings and some slightly pathetic caged monkeys. Open daily from 10:30 am to 8 pm.

$-$$ **Portal La Leyenda Café Bar** doubles as an art gallery with the work of local artists on display and a café/bar offering light meals. At night, the bar is lit only by candles and offers a variety of cocktails and drinks, both domestic and imported. Open daily from 11 am to 10 pm.

Valle de Angeles

Farther along, nearly 14 miles (22 km) from Tegucigalpa, Valle de Angeles, another Colonial town that sprung up from mining activities, is a popular weekend excursion for the city folk, with a multitude of craftsmen's shops and restaurants. The trip from Tegucigalpa takes about an hour on the bus or 45 minutes in a car. Once you arrive, everything is within easy walking distance of the town square where a throng of restaurants can be found.

Dozens of souvenir stores and typical eating places line the streets, while local artists perform in the plaza on the weekend. Valle de Angeles is one of the best places in Honduras to buy handicrafts. Shops sell goods from all over Honduras, Central America, Columbia and Peru. The village is famed for its high-quality wood products such as intricately carved mahogany headboards, doors, tables, chests, and frames – any of which they will even ship home for you. The large artisan center (*Centro de Artesanías*) carries a variety of products such as paintings, wood products, pottery, jewelry, pewter, tapestries, native blouses and dresses, hammocks, Honduras t-shirts, Honduran cigars and rum. Numerous small shops around town also sell fine crafts.

A good place to buy a gift to take home is **Lessandra Leather**, which has its main shop in front of the artisan center and sells high-quality leather goods that include bags, belts, wallets, briefcases, and purses, among other products. Most stores in Valle de Angeles accept major credit cards.

Canopy tours are available every weekend in Valle de Angeles, before 5 pm. Each tour costs about $20 per person. Inquire about tours at the artisan center.

Visitors can use the **pool** at Posada del Angel hotel for about $3 per person for the day.

Where to Stay

$ **Posada del Angel**, ☎ 766-2233, hotelposadadelangel@yahoo.com, offers 20 clean rooms with private bath, hot water, cable TV. Amenities include restaurant, bar, and a pool.

$-$$ **Hotel Villas del Valle Resort**, www.villasdelvalle.com, is about a quarter-mile out of town on the road to San Juancito. This small hotel offers duplex cottages with porches, private bath, hot water, bathtubs, and large beds. They also have a less expensive option of four guest rooms with shared bath in the building where the lobby and dining room are located.

Where to Eat

$ **Restaurant El Anafre**, in front of the central plaza, has indoor and outdoor seating with a great selection of typical *anafres* (a black bean and cheese fondue often with veggies), grilled meats, pizza, wine, beer and soft drinks. Open Thursday to Tuesday from 9 am to 8 pm.

$ **Epocas**, next door to El Anafre, serves typical Honduran fare with grilled beef specialties. They are an interesting combination of restaurant, well-stocked bar, and antique shop, open Tuesday to Friday from 10 am to 10 pm and on the weekends from 10 am to to midnight. All antiques on display are for sale.

$-$$ **La Casa de las Abuelas** is in an old Colonial house that has been nicely renovated and furnished. This historic site used to belong to the great-grandmother of the owners, and

has a plaque on the wall reading "Here lived Dr. Policarpo Bonilla, President of the Republic from 1894 to 1899." La Casa de las Abuelas is a lovely and quaint restaurant offering continental and local cuisine, an extensive wine list, and a complete bar. Open from Tuesday to Sunday for lunch and dinner. This is the only restaurant open for dinner till 10 pm. Internet services are also available here.

$-$$ **La Florida Restaurant and Recreation**, ☎ 766-2121, is near the entrance to Valle Angeles (on the left as you drive into town), and offers typical Honduran fare with indoor and outdoor seating, full bar service, souvenirs, and a large children's playground that includes pony rides. Horseback riding for adults is also available.

$-$$ **Rancho Santa Fe Restaurant and Bar** is in a restored Colonial building. This restaurant is decorated with antiques, and has carved details such as the beautifully banister leading to the second floor. The menu specializes in grilled beef and pork platters, a small selection of wine, as well as a nice choice of desserts and good coffee. Full bar service. Open Thursday to Sunday from 10 am to 10 pm and Friday and Saturday till midnight.

$-$$ **Don Quijote** is on the outskirts of town. This is a branch of the Tegucigalpa restaurant with locations in La Leona and the Boulevard Morazán – one of the best restaurants in Valle de Angeles. The menu includes Spanish and international cuisine, with scrumptious Spanish paellas and a good selection of wines. Full bar service.

La Tigra National Park

A mere seven miles (11 km) northwest of Tegucigalpa, this park provides the *capitalinos* (residents of the capital) with a wondrous rainforest mountain retreat. Small brooks and waterfalls flow through giant ferns amidst lush pine, oak, and liquidambar forests draped in carpets of moss, orchids, and bromeliads where you can hike for miles on peaceful, well-maintained trails. Numerous bird species, including toucans and quetzals, inhabit the park, as do ocelots, squirrels, and other small mammals and dozens of butterfly species. The best time of day for bird-watching is in the morning, but even if you get there in the afternoon, you will enjoy the sweet

flute-like song of the shy *jilguero* (finch) that inhabits the forests along the trails. If you stay the night, you might be fortunate enough to see an ocelot; a park ranger in Jutiapa recently told me that one was wandering around the parking lot at dusk. Although much of the park's primary forests – especially near El Rosario – were destroyed during the mining era, the forest has regenerated over the last 50 years and is a fun place to explore.

Dozens of springs and streams in the park provide nearly 40% of the capital's water supply and, because of that, the park was the first area in Honduras to receive status as a national park in 1980, with a core zone of 18,708 acres. An eight-day documentary, *Honduras Indómita*, was filmed in La Tigra in 2002. You can visit the project's website in Spanish at www.hondurasindomita.com for excerpts and photos. The website was the recipient of the prestigious international Golden Web Award 2002-2003.

More information about the park is available at the offices of the foundation that manages the park, Fundación Amigos de la Tigra (AMITIGRA), with administrative offices at: Edificio Italia, Apartamento #6, Col. Palmira, Tegucigalpa, ☎ 232-6771, 232-5503.

Getting There

There are two roads into the park; one is the 13.6-mile (22-km) road through El Hatillo that leads to the park entrance at Jutiapa; the other longer route (22 miles/36 km) takes you through Valle de Angeles and San Juan to the El Rosario Visitor's Center. Many hotels can arrange for transportation to the park and a tour. Also, mini-vans that offer transportation to sites around the city often park in the Palmira hotel district (Hotel Honduras Maya/Hotel Plaza San Martin area). You might try and get a group together with other guests or ask the driver if he has any trips already planned, so that everyone pays less for transportation. The park is open to the public from Tuesday through Sunday, 8 am to 2 pm (the latest hour visitors are admitted); however, you may stay in the park until 5 pm. Admission is $10 for adults, $5 for children under 12, seniors, and people with disabilities. Guides are required for groups of 10 or more people and cost

about $10 a day, or less for shorter hikes. At both entrances you'll find space to pitch a tent, or you can ask the ranger to point out the trails that have campsites. Camping costs $3.50 a night.

To Jutiapa

The Jutiapa entrance is easiest to get to and more trailheads begin there. Buses leave for the park from a stop one block south of Parque Finlay downtown, which is close to the Hotels Granada #2 and #3. You can walk to the Parque Finlay from Central Plaza. Buses ($1) leave for Los Planes at 7 am and 11 am. Unless you plan on camping or lodging in the park, it's better to take the 7 am bus, as the trip takes two hours and the park entrance is a mile or a 30-minute walk from Los Planes.

If you have a car, take the road from town to El Picacho and El Hatillo and on through the communities of Los Jutes, Los Limones, Matasanos, Jutiapa, and Planes all the way to the Jutiapa Visitor Center. There is a very basic store at the visitor's centers that sells water, sodas, assorted chips, and sometimes blueberries or strawberries.

To El Rosario

Getting to the northeastern park entrance entails traveling from Tegucigalpa to Valle de Angeles and continuing past the latter for about 30 minutes until you reach the left-hand turn to San Juancito and El Rosario. San Juancito is about 7½ miles (12 km) from Valle de Angeles. El Rosario Visitor's Center is almost two miles (three km) from San Juancito, and it takes about an hour and half to walk/climb the hill on the road. If you're driving, a four-wheel-drive vehicle is necessary during the rainy season for this last leg of the trip from San Juancito to El Rosario, which is a steep and winding uphill dirt road.

Direct buses make the two-hour trip from Tegucigalpa to San Juancito every morning at 8 am and return at a 6 pm daily (80¢) from the San Pablo Market (Mercado San Pablo) in the Barrio El Manchén. If you miss the direct bus, you can take the bus from the same place (schedule varies) to Cantarranas/San Juan Flores and get off at the junction to San Juancito. From this point to El Rosario the distance is a little over three miles (5.2 km).

Lodging

El Rosario is where the El Rosario Mining Company was headquartered high above the valley until half a century ago. Unfortunately, many of the old and already rotten wooden buildings were further destroyed by Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

At the end of the road, restored buildings house the visitor's center and an **eco-lodge** that is open-year round and has a capacity for 50 guests in 11 rooms. The cost is about $6 (Lps. 100) a person. It offers basic services (shower, bathrooms, food service). The idea was to keep it simple so this is a rustic lodge where you can spend the night and wake up early in the morning for a hike. There are also a couple of *pulperías* (food stores) and very basic eateries in El Rosario, which are about a 10-minute walk from the visitor's center.

Another much more comfortable lodging is the **Mirador El Rosario** that is set in a lovely garden and has spectacular vistas of nearby mountains and the valley below. A German couple has built their home and an extra cabin with two rooms for rent on the mountainside. They serve food, including vegetarian platters and homemade bread. They offer transportation from San Juancito to El Rosario for about $10. For reservations, call ☎ 987-5835.

Trails

Adventurous hikers can enter the park at the Jutiapa and cross the entire cloud forest on the main trail – originally a logging road – in about four hours, coming out at El Rosario. The trip, of course, can also be done in reverse. If you don't plan to cross the entire park, both sides have their advantages. El Rosario provides great views and a lesson in mining history, while Jutiapa has more trails. All trails circle back to the visitors centers.

> **Note:** The Park's highest peaks – Cerro la Peña de Andino, at 7,513 feet/2,290 m, and Cerro El Volcán, at 7,447 feet/2,270 m – are off-limits to visitors. Please respect park regulations. If you do decide to wander off the marked trails on your own, at least try to get back to your destination visitor's center on

time. If you don't show by 5 pm, the park rangers will start looking for you; even if they are ready to go home.

From Jutiapa

Las Granadillas Trail is short (a quarter of a mile/596 m), reaching an altitude of 6,151 feet (1,875 m). It begins right in front of Jutiapa Visitor Center. This is an easy hike with moderate slopes and is recommended for children, seniors, or the disabled. There is a brook flowing alongside the trail; a lot of epiphytes, mushrooms, lichen, and mosses can be seen on the trail. You turn back at the wooden look-out platform, or continue climbing a 65-foot (20-m) stairway, where you will find the Jucuara Trail. A right turn on this trail will take you back to the visitor's center.

Bosque Nublado (Cloud Forest) Trail reaches 6,791 feet (2,070 m) and is almost a mile (1½ km). This was the first trail to be opened to the public, and its name was derived from the surrounding cloud forest. Broad-leaved trees, lichens, mushrooms and epiphytes interact to capture and store water. The nightingale-thrush is heard along the trail like a mysterious and melodious natural forest flute. The trail has moderate to steep slopes and its entrance is just east of the visitor's center.

The **Jucuara Trail** is a little more than a mile, with a peak altitude of 6,735 feet (2,053 m) and is recommended for all ages. The trail begins north of the visitor's center, with soft to moderate slopes and leads to a natural spring. From Mirador del Claro (the lookout), you can see the three types of forest in the park, namely, the pine forest, the mixed forest, and the broad-leaf forest.

La Esperanza Trail reaches 7,186 feet (2,190 m) and is about a mile and a quarter long (2,015 m). This trail was the old road to the ventilation shaft, or La Esperanza Mine. The trail starts a quarter of a mile east of the visitor's center and ends at Rancho Quemado, the highest point in the park that is accessible to the public.

From El Rosario

La Mina Trail is 1¾ mile long and reaches an altitude of 5,872 feet (1,790 m). On this trail you will see brooks that

spring forth high up in the mountain and fascinating views of both the cloud forest and the beautiful Cantarranas Valley. Finally, you will come to the ruins of the Peña Blanca mine entrance, former property of El Rosario Mining Company. This trail begins half a mile (818 m) west of the El Rosario Ecolodge.

From Either Visitor's Center

La Cascada Trail, or Waterfall Trail, reaches an altitude of 6,200 feet (1,890 m) and is more than two miles long with very steep slopes. The trail leads you under the rainforest canopy to a 200-foot (61-m) waterfall. From Jutiapa you can get to the eastern entrance of La Cascada Trail by taking either La Esperanza Trail or Bosque Nublado Trail to the main trail, which you then follow until reaching the waterfall trailhead. The waterfall is about the same distance from El Rosario visitor's center as from the Jutiapa visitor's center. From El Rosario, take La Mina Trail and follow it for its entire length until reaching La Cascada trailhead.

El Picacho National Park

El Picacho is a national park on the north side of the city, which offers the best views of Tegucigalpa and is also where the Christ Statue is located. The park has a Confucian garden and the small national zoo. Although modest, the zoo does have some interesting wildlife such as agoutis, a tapir, jaguars, parrots, toucans, hawks, deer, ocelots, jaguarondis, etc. Buses leave for the park from a stop one block south of Parque Finlay downtown. You can also hire a taxi, but don't pay more than $5 to $7. Admission is $1.50.

Where to Stay in Tegucigalpa

Near the Mall

$$$$ **Camino Real Inter Continental**, Ave Roble, across the street from the Multiplaza Mall, ☎ 231-2727, www.ictegucigalpa.gruporeal.com. This luxury hotel caters to the business traveler, with 157 rooms and suites. All have private bath, hot water, phone, a/c, wireless Internet access, kitchenette, direct-dial

HOTEL PRICE CHART	
Rates are per room per night, based on double occupancy.	
	Under US$20
$	US$20-40
$$	US$41-80
$$$	US$81-125
$$$$	US$126-200
$$$$$	Over US$200

phone, two phone lines, voicemail, cable TV, temperature control, alarm clock, hairdryer, newspaper, radio, safe, desk, movies, and mini-bar. Non-smoking rooms available. Other services include handicapped rooms, restaurant, cafeteria, bar, casino, business center, laundry, house nurse, safe boxes, courier service, shops, currency exchange, tour/airline desk, car rental, complimentary airport shuttle, 24-hour security, secure parking, gym, spa, pool, and Jacuzzi. Major credit cards accepted.

Colonia Palmira

$$$$ **Hotel Honduras Maya**, Ave Republica de Chile, Colonia Palmira, ☎ 220-5000, www.hondurasmaya.hn, sales@hondurasmaya.hn. This 12-story hotel is one of the oldest hotels in the city and is an easily identifiable landmark in a convenient location. Accommodations include 177 rooms with private bath, hot water, phone, a/c, wireless Internet access, and cable TV. Other services include a casino, restaurant, coffee shop, bar, business center, room service, laundry, safe, beauty parlor/barber, shops, travel agency, car rental, secure parking, health spa, and pool.

$$$$ **Plaza San Martin**, Frente Plaza San Martin, around the corner from the Hotel Maya, Colonia Palmira, ☎ 238-4500. Another central, upscale hotel offering 110 rooms with private bath, hot water, tea/coffeemaker, hairdryer, mini-bar, modem connection, wireless Internet access, cable TV/movies, a/c, safe, desk, iron/ironing board, and balcony. They also have a restaurant, bar, business center, secretarial service, translation service, room service, laundry/dry cleaning, disabled facilities, barber/beauty salon, airport transportation, parking, gym, and nightclub.

$$$$ **Hotel Portal del Angel**, 2115 Ave Republica del Peru, Colonia Palmira, ☎ 239-6538, www.portaldelangel.com,

hotel@portaldelangel.com. This popular boutique hotel is in the heart of Colonia Palmira and offers 23 rooms with work area, private bath, hot water, a/c, cable TV, direct-dial phone and a complimentary breakfast. Services include room service, laptop computers for rent, business center, restaurant, laundry and dry cleaning, tourist guides and a small pool.

$$$ **Leslie's Bed and Breakfast Place**, Colonia Palmira, San Martin #452, ☎ 239-0641, www.dormir.com, services@dormir.com. This conveniently located B&B offers 20 rooms, with private bath, hot water, cable TV, telephone, a/c or fan, safe deposit box, direct-dial phone calls, Internet access through modem using RJ-11 connectors and a complimentary breakfast. Other services include Internet access, laundry, and a fitness center.

$$ **Confort Guest House**, around the corner from the Hotel Maya and across the street from the Hotel Plaza San Martin, ☎ 238-3864, 238-9721, www.confortguest.com, reservaciones@confortguest.com. This small hotel is in the heart of the Colonia Palmira hotel district and offers 10 cozy and clean rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, fan, cable TV, direct-dial phone, Internet access, with modem, work table and free breakfast and coffee. Amenities include lounge, pool, breakfast room, parking, beauty salon, souvenir store, tour connections, and airport transportation.

$$ **Casal Bed and Breakfast**, Paseo Republica del Perú, No. 2116, two blocks north of Blvd. Morazán, ☎ 235-8891. This well-situated small hotel has 10 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, cable TV, and cafeteria. This hotel is a favorite of certain groups traveling to Honduras, so check for availability.

$$ **Linda Vista Bed and Breakfast**, Calle Las Acacias No. 1438, Colonia Palmira, ☎ 231-0099. This hotel, nicely decorated in a Colonial style with a lot of woodwork detail, offers four comfortable single and two double rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, direct-dial phone, cable TV, and safe deposit boxes. Other services include dining area, fax, and taxi services.

Downtown

$$$ **Best Western Hotel Excelsior**, Ave Cervantes, #1515, down the hill from the Hotel Maya, ☎ 237-2638. This hotel is

conveniently near downtown and offers 85 rooms with private bath, hot water, cable TV, a/c, and phone. They also have suites with kitchenettes. There is a casino, restaurant, bar, room service, boutique, drugstore and small pool.

$$ **Hotel Istmania**, 5 Ave, 7-8 Calle, No. 1438, one block north of Los Dolores Church downtown, ☎ 237-1638/9. lahasbun@hotmail.com. This clean hotel has 34 rooms and some suites with private bath, hot water, a/c, satellite TV, room service, and free newspaper. Amenities include laundry/dry cleaning, child care, travel agency, car rental, bar, restaurant, and parking.

$$ **Hotel MacArthur**, between 4-5 Ave, 8 Calle (Cuesta Lempira), ☎ 237-9839, 237-5906, http://interguia.hn/directorio/hoteles/macarthur, homacart@datum.hn. This pleasant and clean hotel with tiled floors and wood furnishings is a tour operator favorite (check availability) and offers 45 rooms with private bath, hot water, a/c, and cable TV. Double rooms include two double beds and a sofa bed. They have laundry service, a cafeteria/coffee shop on premises, parking, pool, and nearby bakery.

Hotel Granada #1, ☎ 237-2381, #2, ☎ 237-7079, and #3, ☎ 237-0812. All three hotels are near Parque Finlay, but try to stay in either #2 or #3, which are only slightly more expensive, but in a better area. Accommodations include singles and doubles with or without private baths (all baths have hot water) and TV for $10 to $20. For a quieter stay, ask for a room on an upper floor that is not facing the street.

Tobacco Road Tavern has a new location on the Ave Juan Gutemburg in front of Commercial El Million. The owner, US expatriate Tom Taylor, lives on the premises and is a good source of information. Dorm-style accommodations include good beds at budget prices and continental breakfast is included.

Where to Eat

Culinary excellence is not one of Honduras' claims to fame. But Tegucigalpa is a large city and offers a myriad of possibilities, including many above-average eateries, fast food, and several restaurants offering fine dining.

Fast food is the norm downtown with US franchises, small eateries serving up quick Mexican-style tacos and sandwiches, bakeries, and coffee shops scattered throughout the area. There are Chinese restaurants on just about every block also.

> **Tip:** The only *pulpería* or food store still in existence in the immediate downtown area is **Chinda Díaz**, which is on the corner across the street from the southeast corner of the Cathedral and which has basic supplies. They also sell good chicken and pork tamales from a huge bucket that empties rather quickly. A couple of hot tamales are a quick and easy fix that will fill you up nicely.

Downtown

Vegetarian

$-$$ **Cocina Creativa**. From the eastern end of the Pedestrian Street by the Cathedral, walk 3½ blocks east down Ave Miguel Barahona. Lucila Inestroza, the owner of this small spot, offers a clean and cozy atmosphere with attention to details. A fresh flower on the table, a clean tablecloth, cloth napkins, and the good service make for a nice meal in a pleasant atmosphere. The menu creatively combines Honduran and international cuisine and includes vegetarian fare. Enjoy perfectly cooked veggies, tofu, pita bread, and a fresh salad. For the meat eater, steaks, surf and turf, and some delightful breaded and spicy fish cakes are some of the choices. Smaller meals include ham and cheese, chicken, tuna fish, and club sandwiches, and fresh fruit salads. As in the rest of Honduras, vegetarians can order a cheese sandwich by asking for a ham and cheese sandwich without the ham. The coffee here is excellent and daily specials are posted on a board at the entrance. The tables in front of the large bay window are also a good

DINING PRICE CHART	
Price per person for an average meal, not including beverage.	
$	Under US$5
$$	US$5-10
$$$	US$11-20
$$$$	US$20-50

place to people-watch. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 am for breakfast, lunch and early dinner. Recommended.

$ **Comedor Vegetariano**, Ave Cervantes, is one block south and half a block west of southeast corner of the post office. A dreary vegetarian eatery that has been around forever, but with friendly service, a plate of the day, and an inexpensive breakfast and lunch menu that includes such fare as soy patties prepared in different ways with a veggie side-dish, soups, fresh yogurt, and fruit drinks. They also offer vegetarian cooking classes. Closed Sundays. Open from 10:30 am to 5 pm.

Art, Books & Food

$ **Café Paradiso** is across from *El Arbolito*, a huge cypress tree where the street does a turn-around, at the end of Ave Miguel Paz Barahona. This European-style café serves Spanish tapas, pastas, espresso coffee, cheesecake, wine, and beer. Their gallery café hosts cultural events, recitals, workshops, and press conferences, as well as art exhibits. There is also a small souvenir shop and a bookstore that features the work of Honduran writers. Every Tuesday, Café Paradiso and Cine Olay offer independent films at 7 pm followed by a discussion. Admission is free. Open Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 10 pm.

Bakeries

$ **Salman's Bakery**, one of the oldest bakeries in Tegucigalpa, has several locations downtown. Two are on the Ave Cristóbal Colón. One is 2½ blocks west from the northwest corner of the Central Plaza and is where the actual bakery is located, so you can get hot bread and other goodies right out of the oven. The other is 4½ blocks east from the northeast corner of the park. Aside from the usual baked goods such as cakes and pastries, Salman's is best-known for their famous baguette or *baget* – as it is called in Honduras – which you can buy for just 50¢. This long loaf of bread is great with *mantequilla blanca* – which is white cream that you can buy in the supermarket for about 50¢ a bag in the refrigerated section. The *bagets* are also good for sandwiches to take on your sightseeing excursions, particularly hiking, when a boost of carbs can go a long way.

$ **Super Donuts**, Pedestrian Street, about half a block from the park on the left. This long-standing doughnut shop offers good Honduran-style buffets as well as good assorted pastries, which include chocolate and cheese cake. Closed Sunday.

Restaurants & Cafés

$ **Café Espresso Americano**, north of the middle of the plaza on the corner of Ave Cristóbal Colón. Franchise coffee shop with locations throughout Honduras offering a variety of pastries such as brownies, carrot cake, oatmeal and chocolate chip cookies. Italian-style fresh-brewed mocha, cappuccino, espresso and coffee-flavored smoothies.

$-$$ **La Terraza de Don Pepé**, Ave Cristóbal Colón, 2½ blocks west of the Central Plaza, is a large second-floor restaurant, in an old building with the large spaces of yesteryear. Indoor and outdoor terrace dining, background organ music performed by a blind musician, friendly service and low prices offer a true Honduras experience. This family-style restaurant, owned by longtime Cuban expatriate and philanthropist Don Pepé, offers a wide menu of generous beef, chicken, and pork platos típicos at bargain prices. Although this is not fine dining, the filet mignon and cordon bleu platters cost between $4 and $5 and are hard to beat for the price. Menu also includes several hearty breakfast options, sandwiches and desserts such as banana splits for about $1.50-$2. Open daily from 9 am to 9:30 pm.

RESTROOM SHRINE

The small statue of the Patron Saint of Honduras that is only 2½ inches tall (six cm), the Virgen of Suyapa (1768), was stolen for the second time on September 2, 1986. Fortunately, the holy image was found later the same day, wrapped in newspaper in the men's room of La Terraza de Don Pepé. As a result, the restroom has become a shrine in honor of the virgin.

$ **Taco Mexi**, Ave Juan Gutemburg, five blocks east of park, offers very inexpensive Mexican fast food, including tacos, sandwiches/tortas and enchiladas.

$ **Duncan Mayan**, Ave Cristóbal Colón, two blocks west of the Central Plaza. This is a large, café-type restaurant that is a favorite drinking hole for local men. While some travel guides may recommend dining here, with so many other places to choose from, there is no reason to do so. The atmosphere is not particularly pleasant and the hygiene is somewhat suspect.

$$-$$$ **El Quijote**. From the northwest corner of the Central Plaza, walk one block west to the Pizza Hut, cross the street and follow the Calle La Leona about 3½ blocks. The last block and a half is uphill and the restaurant is on the right-hand side. Owned and opened by a Spanish expat over 30 years ago, this is one of the oldest restaurants in Tegucigalpa and offers nice views of the Central Plaza and the Cathedral. The International menu specializes in Spanish paellas and seafood plates that can be accompanied with a glass of wine from a large selection of European and South American varieties. Full-service bar. Open Monday to Saturday from 9 am to 11 pm. Closes Monday at 8 pm.

Franchises

Several fast-food chains have downtown locations, including McDonalds, Burger King, Wendy's, Pizza Hut, Pollo Campero, Little Ceasar's, and Church's Chicken.

Colonia Palmira & Boulevard Morazán

The largest concentration of restaurants, clubs, wine pubs, and bars is in the Colonia Palmira, and on and around the Boulevard Morazán. Here you'll find restaurants specializing in seafood, gourmet, Arab, Mexican, Chinese, Italian, Japanese, South American steaks, and Honduran fare. The boulevard is also the best place to go in search of nightlife.

Colonia Palmira

The **Bakery Center Building** – one block north of the western end of Boulevard Morazán on Calle República de Argentina – is a small shopping center with three great upscale restaurants. Expect to pay a good price for the good food. On

the ground level, you'll find **Pan y Mas**, the best bakery in Honduras, offering a wide selection of baked goods including scrumptious brownies, cheesecakes, German chocolate cake, and a variety of breads. Another is **Gyros**, which specializes in gourmet Arab cuisine, offering buffet-style lunches and also selling ingredients for Middle-Eastern cooking. On the upper level, you'll find a rarity in Honduras, **The Sushi Bar**.

$$ **Furiwa #2**, Paseo República de Panamá, is two blocks up from the Mas x Menos Supermarket on the Ave La Paz. This restaurant is easily recognizable by the life-size orange palm trees in the yard. Chinese and international cuisine is served from an extensive menu. Open Monday to Saturday from 10 am to 10:30 pm. Full bar service.

$-$$ **Gino's Pasta-Café**, Paseo República de Peru, is around the corner from the Hotel Maya in front of the small park with a long na (Plaza del Libertador General San Martín). This well-lit and airy café with a casual ambiance offers a full menu of good Italian-style cuisine, including appetizers, salads, soups, pizzas, sandwiches, pastas, meat dishes, and wonderful desserts, drinks, and a good selection of Italian wine and liqueurs. Open for lunch and early dinner on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 11 am to 6 pm, Wednesday from 11 am to 9 pm, and Saturday from 11 am to 3 pm.

$-$$ **Café Savant**, New Age Café, Calle Rep. de Argentina, #201, in front of the Bakery Center Building. Live the '70s experience at Café Savant, which offers a range of services, including food, a spa, books, and Internet access in a peaceful ambience. Interior décor is based on the principals of Feng Shui with plants, fountains, and walls covered with the work of local artists on consignment. This is an ideal place for some quiet time on your own to read a book, have some coffee, and/or enjoy a meal from a menu that includes salads and sandwiches with vegetarian alternatives. The café offers new books for sale and used books for sale or exchange, as well as various crystals, jewelry, and natural products. Tuesday is lecture day and different speakers present New Age topics. Open Tuesday and Wednesday from 11 am to 9 pm and Thursday to Saturday from 11 am to 10 pm. Closed Sunday and Monday.

● Upscale

$$-$$$$ **Rojo**, Verde y Ajo, Ave República de Argentina. This elegant restaurant offers an extensive menu of Mediterranean-style cuisine, a good wine list, and delicious appetizers. Full bar. Open from Monday to Saturday for lunch and dinner. Food served until 11 pm.

$$-$$$ **Café Honoré**, Ave República de Argentina. This large air-conditioned gourmet deli offers delicious, well-prepared sandwiches, soups, and salads that are more costly than average, but worth every penny to those in search of a great meal. The last thing I tried was a delightful salmon sandwich with mozzarella cheese, ripe tomato, avocado, and lettuce on a toasted bun. Open Monday to Saturday from 11 am to 11 pm.

Boulevard Morazán

● Fast Food & Other Franchises

Never to fear, your fast food fix can be found here. A multitude of fast-food restaurants are on the Boulevard Morazán. From east to west you can find Pizza Hut, Papa John's, Wendy's, McDonald's, Domino's, Subway's, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Popeye's, Dunkin Donuts –with Baskin Robbins ice cream, Quiznos, and TGI Friday's.

● Honduran Fast Food/Snacks

Again heading from east to west. On the south side of the Boulevard, $ **Salman's Bakery** has a large, air-conditioned shop and offers sodas, sandwiches, small pizzas, and other baked goods as well as their famous baguette. $ **Taco Loco** is a long-time favorite luncheon spot at the end of the two-story mall next to Salman's on the first floor with outdoor seating. Try their famous Gringa! (a huge, greasy flour tortilla filled with meat in melted cheese). Farther down the boulevard on the north side of the street, after the first stop light past the Kodak store on the corner and the adjacent large Avon building on the next corner, is $ **Super Donuts**, an outlet of the downtown café, a popular buffet-style lunch spot offering good meals and a variety of desserts including donuts!

The very visible large two-story shopping mall Los Castaños is another half-block east. The mall has a food court on the second floor where you'll find a number of places offering buf-

fet lunches for the area's office workers, as well as one of my favorites and a good place for vegetarians, $-$$ **Gyros**, which offers Arab deli food and buffet meals, including pita bread, sandwiches, tabouli, kibbe, and falafel. Other eateries in this mall include Pasta Express, Subway's, Burger King, Expresso Americano, as well as pastry carts, all offering something to eat for $1 to $5.

Across the street, next to the humongous Banco Ficensa building on the corner, is the $ **Delipan Bakery**, another favorite spot offering baked desserts, sandwiches, and good lunches. Delipan is the favorite of several people I know, which says a lot considering the large number of eating places in the area.

● Restaurants & Cafés

$-$$ **El Patio Restaurant**, Blvd. Morazán, is probably the most famous typical food restaurant in the country and this location was the first of what is now a national chain. The plant-filled restaurant is in a large open patio with a thatch roof, dozens of tables, a bar, wandering mariachi players, and waitresses in typical dresses. It offers inexpensive platters of *pinchos* (shish kabobs) and steak, as well as their famous *anafres*. *Anafres* are small pottery coal heaters topped with a round pottery platter of refried beans and melted cheese and edged with tortilla chips. A much bigger and newer $$-$$$ **El Patio** is farther west on the Boulevard on the same side of the road and offers a larger menu with slightly higher prices. Both are open daily from 11 am to 2 am.

$-$$ **Cam Fong**, 1½ blocks north on Boulevard Morazán, behind Los Castaños Shopping Mall, offers a large variety of oriental platters such as fried rice, chop suey, egg rolls, won tons, chow mien and the house specialty, seafood in oyster sauce. Delivery available; call ☎ 238-2172, 238-2194.

$$$-$$$$ **Tre Fratelli's**, Ave República de Argentina, #216, is a California chain that offers Americanized Italian fare with California accents, good pizzas, and a complete wine list in a large outdoor dining area. Open noon-11 pm.

$$$-$$$$ **Nobu**, Ave Republica de Argentina, offers a fine mix of Japanese and Thai cuisine in a minimalist décor of bamboo, wicker chairs, colorful paintings, and beautiful tropical flow-

ers. On entering, you leave the hubbub of the city behind, and are enveloped in the cool ambience, where you can enjoy an exceptional meal. Chef Rubens offers a multitude of rich flavors in the menu, which includes soups, noodles, salads, rice and curries and 37 types of sushi. Every Thursday and Sunday night are open sushi nights with all you can eat for $20.

$$$-$$$$ **Casa Maria**, Ave Ramón Ernesto Cruz #202, Colonia Castaño Sur. Take the road south between Credomatic and Ficensa on the Boulevard, ☎ 239-4984. Casa María is a local favorite with a Colonial atmosphere and international cuisine. They have many "secret" family recipes, such as the camarones Maria (shrimp), corvina carmencita (fish fillet), and apple crêpes. Full-bar service. Open Monday to Saturday from 11:30 am to 10:30 pm. Reservations are recommended, so call ahead.

$$-$$$$ **Ni Fu Ni Fa**, which loosely translates to "neither here nor there," is on the Boulevard Morazán across the street from El Dorado Mall. This new Argentinean-style restaurant offers great imported steaks and a wonderful salad bar. Open daily from noon to 11 pm.

Colonia Ruben Dario, South of the Boulevard Morazán

This small neighborhood is accessed on the street descending south from the Boulevard Morazán to the El Cenáculo, just before the Salman's building, with a very visible dark yellow church one block down on the right-hand side. Two blocks farther along on the right-hand side is Cybex, a large and very modern health club.

$-$$ **La Albahaca** (The Basil), Colonia Ruben Dario. From the Boulevard, take the road down the steep hill just before Salman's to the right and then take the first left. The restaurant is a two-story white building about 1½ blocks from the corner (from where it is not visible) and is a favorite lunch spot offering Italian fare and great pizza from their industrial pizza oven. Indoor dining and outdoor seating on the front porch and on a covered upper-story terrace. Open Monday to Saturday from 11 am to 11 pm.

Juan Pablo II Boulevard

This modern commercial section stretches from the stoplight near the Hotel Clarion past the spanking new and shiny Hotel Marriot and the Presidential Palace, to a second stoplight about a quarter-mile down the road. After the second one, the four-lane avenue narrows a little before reaching the Multiplaza Mall on the right or to the south. Fast-food restaurants Burger King, MacDonald's, Pizza Hut, amd Pollos Camperos are on this strip, as are a couple of clubs and the Marriot hotel, which offers both a restaurant and bar.

$$-$$$ **El Corral** is about a block north of the Ave Juan Pablo II, in front of Hotel Clarion. This is a very good steakhouse with a complete menu that also offers seafood, pork, and chicken platters and a large selection of wine. Open Monday to Saturday from 11 am to 11 pm. Karaoke nights are on Thursday and Saturday.

$$-$$$ **Tony's Mar**, next door to the very visible Bridgestone tire store and service center, is a favorite local seafood restaurant with fish tanks, friendly service, and a large menu of excellent seafood platters. Open Monday to Saturday from 11 am to 11 pm. Recommended.

Multiplaza Mall

For a taste of Americana, notable restaurants and eateries near and around Multiplaza include: **TGI Friday's** and **Baskin Robbins** inside the mall; **Tony Roma's**, serving its famous barbecued ribs behind the mall; and **Ruby Tuesday's**, with a giant TV screen, indoor/outdoor seating, and dozens of cocktails, is about a mile east along the road that runs east-west to the north of the mall. If you continue east from Ruby Tuesday's half a mile on the right-hand side is a turn-off onto a large four-lane boulevard about a mile long. **Applebee's** can be found on the right-hand side of this road.

Hotel Restaurants

Coffee House, Hotel Honduras Maya. Breakfast and lunch buffet. Open daily from 7 am to 11 pm.

Azulejos Restaurant is in the Hotel Intercontinental, serving international cuisine and the best desserts. Open daily from 6 am to 11 pm.

Out of Town

La Cumbre is a mountain restaurant in a forest environment in El Hatillo and is one of the best restaurants in city. The restaurant offers fine dining and an intimate atmosphere with indoor/outdoor dining areas, an international menu with some German specialties and a spectacular view of the eastern side of Tegucigalpa. Call ahead for reservations ☎ 211-9000. Open Tuesday to Saturday from noon to 3 pm and 6-10 pm.

> **Note:** For those who have visited Tegucigalpa previously, the following well-known restaurants are no more, so don't go looking for them: El Arriero, La Alhondra, and La Hacienda.

Nightlife

Taco Taco is one block north of the Boulevard Morazán on Calle República de Argentina. This is a nice bar with indoor bar and tables, as well as outdoor seating under the large mango tree and awning. Full bar service and Mexican food featuring tacos.

Iguana Rana Bar is on Boulevard Morazán with outdoor seating right on the street. This informal bar offers snacks and TV screens to watch sporting events such as Monday Night Football.

Arenas Sport Café, Blvd. Morazán, is a favorite local hangout where you can watch major sporting events on screens throughout. Open Tuesday to Saturday from 5 pm to 2:30 am, and on Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm during NFL season. Full bar service and snacks. A $5 cover charge from Thursday to Saturday.

Bamboo, a popular night spot, is on the eastern end of Blvd. Morazán and has three bars, a large dance floor, a comfortable VIP lounge, and an outside area. Cover charge is about $5. Open Monday to Saturday from 8 pm.

Café La Milonga-Tango, Ave República de Argentina, #1802, ☎ 232-2654, hosts regular cultural events that include poetry readings, concerts, discussion groups, book presenta-

tions, tango presentations, dance contests, etc. Snacks and light meals accompany coffee, wine or beer. Call to find out what's on the calendar.

WHAT'S IN A WORD

The Milonga was a South American style of song with a fast 2/4 tempo that was popular in the 19th century. Over time, dance steps and other musical elements were added and the tango was originated. However, the two are not the same and the tango is much more stylized. Milonga is also used to describe a tango dance party.

Tobacco Road Tavern has a new location downtown on the Ave Juan Gutemburg in front of Commercial El Million. The owner, US expatriate Tom Taylor, lives on the premises and is a good source of information. The tavern is open nightly and offers a full bar, a variety of beer, good music, and used books in English for sale.

La Casita del Pueblo, Valle de Angeles, next to the Casa de Cultura, ☎ 238-0110, 776-2907, hosts recitals, local musicians, and a variety of dancers in a Bohemian ambiance that is popular with local artists. Open daily from 3 pm on. Closed Sunday.

Hotel Bars

El Cabildo Bar, Hotel Prado, downtown on the corner opposite the southeast corner of Cathedral. This, the best downtown bar, offers full bar service and live music.

Bar Scenario, Hotel Intercontinental, offers a large choice of international beverages and cocktails accompanied by complimentary snacks.

Bar Napoc, Hotel Marriott, Blvd. Juan Pablo II. This full bar with a large TV screen is a popular destination when local and regional soccer matches are scheduled. Open daily. Happy hour from 5 to 7 pm.

Bar Pub, Hotel Clarion. This is a nice bar with beautiful mahogany finishing and tinted glass windows offering a full service facility with live music from Tuesday to Friday and

"Tobacco and Rum Night" every Thursday and Saturday. Open Tuesday to Sunday from 1 pm to 1 am.

El Mirador, Honduras Maya Hotel, is a full bar near the lobby and close to the entrance for easy access during happy hour with a great snack buffet.

Casinos

Casino Royale, Hotel Honduras Maya. Play blackjack, roulette and baccarat, among other games of chance, or try your luck with the slots.

Excelsior Casino, Hotel Excelsior, Ave Cervantes. This casino offers video slot machines, 13 gaming gables and a cafeteria. Open daily from 5 pm on.

Movies

Most movie theaters offer films in English with Spanish sub-titles. All the newspapers list every theaters every day.

Cinemark Theaters 1 to 6 are in the Multiplaza Mall. Three theaters are at Plaza Miraflores Shopping Center. From downtown, shared taxis from the south side of the park will stop right in front of Plaza Miraflores, but be sure to ask if they are going that way. The **Aries** and **Tauro** are downtown about half a block from the Parque Finlay, near the Granada Hotels.

Theaters

Teatro La Reforma, **Teatro Manuela Bonilla**, **Teatro Plaza Millennium** and other theaters throughout Tegucigalpa often put on plays and other cultural events. Check the daily newspapers for listings and *Honduras This Week*'s Maya Calendar.

■ Southeast Honduras

Zamorano

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The Zamorano Valley is about 22 miles (35 km) east of Tegucigalpa on the road to El Paraíso and the Nicaraguan border. The world-famous **El Zamorano Agricultural School** is here and most of the valley is cultivated under the auspices of the school's different projects, including both agriculture and livestock programs. The school, almost 100 years old, is considered one of the best of its kind in Latin America. Guided tour packages of the school and surrounding area are offered by the W.K. Kellog Training Center and Hotel. For more information, contact Mrs. Soraya de Moreira, ☎ 776-6322, centrokellogg@zamorano.edu.hn.

Even if you don't go on a tour with the school, assuming you drive there or to Danlí, stop at the school's store where they sell fresh dairy, meat, and vegetable products. Try some of their delicious yogurt, ice cream, pastries, and other snacks, all made with the freshest of ingredients.

Yuscarán

Yuscarán, the capital of El Paraíso, is 2,762 feet (842 m) above sea level in a mountainous region, 40 miles (65 km) east of Tegucigalpa. Its population of 9,000 lives in both urban and rural areas. The picturesque Colonial town has a beautiful Central Plaza, a cool climate, cobblestone streets, a cane liquor factory, and surrounding mountains that were recently declared a biological reserve.

Getting There

To get to Yuscarán, you can either take the bus ($2), with **Transportes Cortez** and **Transportes Valle** that leave from Mercado Jacaleapa in the Colonia Kennedy in Tegucigalpa from 6:45 am to

4:45 pm; or take the bus to Danlí and get off at El Empalme and wait for a bus traveling to Yuscarán or hitch a ride. The town is about 10 miles (17 km) from the junction.

History & Sightseeing

Yuscarán is one of most picturesque and well-preserved Colonial towns in Honduras. Its history dates back to the early 1700s when the Spanish discovered gold and silver in the area. Soon after, the town flourished and was a major mining center during the 18th and 19th centuries, first for the Spanish Crown and later for the United States. In 1978, the entire town was declared a national monument and there are more than 200 Colonial buildings here. Cobblestone streets twist among large two-story buildings with tile roofs and whitewashed walls, wooden doors, porches, and windowsills spilling flowers. A tour of **Casa Fortin**, Yuscarán's history museum, in the center of town, will take you further into the past with mining samples and black and white photographs dating back over a hundred years. The museum is open from Monday to Saturday and admission is about 50¢.

BURNING WATER

The mountain of Montserrat, which has been declared a biological reserve, is also the main source of water for Yuscarán and the surrounding area. The villagers use this same pure water to produce the famous Yuscaran-brand sugarcane alcohol known as "burning water" (*aguardiente*, or simply *guaro*). Tours are available in the El Buen Gusto Factory, after which you will most likely be awarded a small bottle of the famed firewater.

Hiking

Montserrat mountain, which looms in the background of the town at 2,624 feet (800 m), is home to the **Yuscarán Biological Reserve** that contains a wide variety of flora and fauna. Hiking trails wind through the reserve, which is home to iguana, deer, and a wide variety of birds and parrots. From the summit of Montserrat (6,202 feet/1,891 m), you can enjoy a unique view of the Nicaragua mountain range and continue hiking to nearby waterfalls that include **La Cascada Aurora** or **La Cascada El Barro**. For more information, visit the offices of the Fundación Yuscarán that manages park facilities in the town hall or Municipalidad. The hike to the summit takes about three hours from town.

Festival

The **Mango Festival** is held during the month of June in Yuscarán. Art exhibits and sporting events are carried out; music and dance groups perform, and typical handicrafts and food are for sale. Guillermo Yuscarán (William Lewis), a US expatriate painter and writer, who adopted the town's name as his own, is usually on hand with a sample of his books and paintings. Guillermo lives in Santa Lucia and is a prolific writer of Honduran tales (see suggested reading).

Where to Stay and Eat

Accommodations include the $ **Casa Colibrí**, a beautifully restored Colonial-style bed and breakfast situated in the Central Plaza. $-$$ **Hotel Carol** is also in the city center. There are coffee houses and a couple of local restaurants or *comedores* serving traditional Honduran meals.

Danlí

Getting There

The largest town in El Paraíso is Danlí, with a population of over 120,000 and about 58 miles (93 km) from Tegucigalpa. To get there, take the **Discua Litena bus** ($2) from the Mercado Jacaleapa in Tegucigalpa; buses leave hourly from 6:30 am to 5:30 pm. Six buses a day also travel all the way to the Las Manos border crossing to Nicaragua. The trip by car takes two hours and the bus three hours.

What to See & Do

Located in the Jamastran Valley, Danlí is also known as "The City of the Hills." There aren't many attractions in this town, but the local **church** does date back to the Colonial period and houses excellent examples of sculpture and paintings from past centuries. The old Municipal Hall has been converted into a **museum** with exhibits covering everything from the area's pre-Columbian history to rustic artifacts from nearby Colonial haciendas. Since this is Honduras' cigar-making capital, tours are also available to local **tobacco factories**. Inquire about tours at the Hotel Granada.

During the month of August, the famed **Corn Festival** is held in Danlí, and local residents celebrate with rodeos, sporting events, parades and food stands specializing in food and drink prepared with corn.

Where to Stay & Eat

If you stay the night, several small hotels, including the basic **Hotel Esperanza**, offer rooms with and without private baths, while the $ **Hotel Granada** is the favorite of the cigar connoisseur crowd. In the downtown area, there are several Internet cafés and small convenience stores (*pulpería*) as well as many local eating spots or *comedores*.

Transportation to Nicaragua

The Las Manos border crossing is easily accessible from Danlí, with buses leaving every half-hour. The border crossing is open from 6 am to 6 pm. On the Nicaraguan side, trucks leave every hour for Ocotal, from where you can catch a bus to either Estelí or Managua.

La Moskitia & Olancho

■ La Moskitia

Imagine gliding down the river in a dug-out canoe through a vast land that has defied the passage of time, where people practice lifestyles that extend thousands of years into the past. As you enter the Moskitia, you will find yourself immersed in a world of awe-inspiring pine forest savannas, dense tropical habitats, meandering, free-flowing rivers, and exotic wildlife. In northeastern Honduras, covering an area of nearly 8,500 square miles (22,500 square km), this region is the largest unspoiled tract of rainforest left in Central America, a must-see for the adventure traveler seeking a truly unique destination.

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Apart from a small, internal system of dirt tracks running from Puerto Lempira to Ahausbila on the Río Coco, there are no roads in this region, and nearly all transportation in La Moskitia is done via small planes, over water, or along narrow jungle trails. Rivers are highways that twist through the vast lowlands, carrying upon them large motorized dugout canoes carved from a single trunk of mahogany. These long, elegant vessels are also known as *cayucos* and *pipantes*. They ply the waters of the Moskitia, paddled or poled along the surface of the rivers and canals that run between lagoons, rivers and the ocean and are the primary means of getting around for inhabitants and visitors alike.

Diversity best describes the flavor of the region: open coasts, estuaries, river valleys, flood plains, fresh-water swamps, lagoons and mangroves. This is one of the most scarcely populated areas of Central America. Four indigenous groups share the area with *ladino* settlers. Indigenous Garífuna, Pech, Miskito and Tawahka live in approximately 200 communities and villages. Each group speaks its own language and has adapted to the local environment in its own distinctive way, giving additional flavor to this exotic setting.

Two Biosphere Reserves can be found in the Moskitia, the Río Plátano and the Tawahka Asangni. These two are just north of the Patuca National Park, in the Department of Olancho, which is adjacent to the Bosawas National Park in Nicaragua. Together, these four comprise the area that has been hailed as "Central America's Little Amazon."

People

The Miskito people form the largest indigenous group found in the Moskitia, numbering around 60,000. Although these names bear a strong similarity to the English word mosquito and while there are plenty of mosquitoes in the Moskitia, the origin of the word derives from the Miskito language and has no relation to the insect. The Miskito live mainly on the coastal areas of Gracias a Díos in elevated homes built of traditional materials such as cane and thatch. They earn a living from fishing, lobster diving, subsistence farming, cattle ranching and, to a small degree, commerce and tourism.

Today indigenous groups in the Moskitia are threatened by encroachment onto their ancestral lands, for which they have no titles, by *ladino* settlers who log and clear the forest for use as pasturelands. Another growing threat to the region is widespread use by the cocaine cartels, which have taken advantage of the region's isolation and turned it into a thoroughfare for drug traffic from South America to lucrative northern markets.

History

The history of the indigenous groups prior to Spanish exploration of the Moskitia is uncertain. It is known that the Pech and Tawahka tribes inhabited the region and were nearly decimated during colonization by the Europeans and also by the Miskito, who sold them into slavery. Dozens of archaeological sites have been identified, but little research has been carried out.